PART 1

Chapter one
Rat Face

She stood before the cupboard in her home, grabbing hold of both the handles, and opening the doors simultaneously.
Within the cupboard, and beyond, was another world. A large town lit by hundreds of lanterns that hung above the dark streets, and everything was utterly still. The moon above was in its whole, shining down its glorious light upon the rooftops.
She leant forwards into the cupboard, and fell down towards the dark town. From her back wings erupted, and she soared through the sky above the town. She climbed higher towards the moon.

'Lilith!'
She opened her eyes.
'Lilith' came the voice again, singing teasingly at her.
She pushed herself up from where she lay resting on her side. Sitting up slowly and lifting her head to the figure that stood before her.
'What are you doing here?' she asked flatly.
'I could ask you the same thing' the figure named Joseph said.
Lilith lowered her eyes glowering.
You are not allowed up here' Joseph told her.
Lilith cast her eyes away from the pest before her and towards the rest of the library.
'I think it's so wrong,' Lilith said 'to hide away all this knowledge from the world.'
'Whatever your opinion on the matter is' Joseph replied, 'is irrelevant. Think of the punishment you would suffer if caught.'
'Don't you mean *when* I'm caught?' Lilith replied meeting his gaze again. 'No doubt you will scurry to the teachers and tell them of my sins. Nothing would give you more pleasure I'm sure than to see me punished.'
'As you deserve' Joseph glared.
'You are not allowed here either. You would surely be punished also' Lilith said. 'If you tell them I was here, I will tell then *you* were here.'
'And who would believe you?'
'My father is a powerful man' Lilith told him. 'I have influence.'
'Not as much as you would if you didn't act like a freak' Joseph shot back. 'And besides, your family is small. Only your father and your servants can tolerate you. I have both my parents and their parents, and aunt and uncles and successful older siblings. If you want to play that game, I assure you, you will lose.'
Lilith gritted her teeth, nails digging into the sofa she sat upon. Her upper lip twitched as she thought desperately for a swift enough and decent response.
'You think you have influence?' Joseph went on. 'Yours is nothing compared to mine. You're just a grey haired freak with no friends.'

Lilith's hand went automatically to her head. All her life she had had grey hair, dirty like smoke. And all her life she had been forced to endure scorn and ridicule because of it.
'I have friends' Lilith muttered. 'But you're right; it's hard to get people to accept you, when you look different. It's hard to live in a city where the people are so judgemental of everyone around them, people who care only about what they see and not what is inside.'
'Even your own mother hates you' Joseph went on, pushing her further. 'My family never treated me like that. People see you for what you are. I will do great things in life, unlike you.'
'It must be nice' Lilith said. 'Living in the shadows of such a rich and powerful family, and using their success to your own benefit, as if you had a hand in anything they've achieved. You act so, but you don't.'
'And you think you are better than me?' Joseph sneered. '*You*.'
'I know much of the world, and of life. I have learnt, I have travelled, and done far more good for this world than you ever will. You know nothing.' She lifted her heavy eyes to him.
'Uncultured swine.'
He slapped her.
Lilith froze in shock for a moment, head still turned to the side. Cheek burning.
She slowly turned her head back towards him; then rose, very slowly to her feet.
The two locked stares, each challenging the other, and for the longest time, neither moved.
Lilith was the first to act. She swung to the side, reaching for a medium stone statue of a naked woman that happened to be in arms reach, intending to strike Joseph with it. But a voice called out to stop her.
'ENOUGH!'
Lilith froze, still holding the statue high, arms outstretched as she had been ready to swing. She glared at Joseph. Eyes burning, brow furrowed and lips twitching in a snarl.
'LILITH!' came the same voice. 'Put that down!'
Still holding up the statue, Lilith turned her head, seeing a tall dark haired figure striding towards her across the open hall. His tall black boots echoed with each heavy footstep, and his dark cloak billowed menacingly behind him as he approached.
Her heart sank at the sight of him. It was one of the teachers.
'What on earth do you think you're doing?' the teacher asked incredulous, glaring at her as he stopped beside her. His dark eyes, oiled pointed beard and narrow face gave him a very sharp look, like a vulture.
Lilith looked back at Joseph angrily. He had not moved or even flinched at her action, he just gazed back at her calmly. But below the surface, Lilith could see his uncertainty. He too was nervous at the sudden appearance of the teacher.
'Lilith' the teacher prompted.
Lilith lowered her head, placing the statue back in its place.
'You do realise that if you were a low-born you could be killed for being here. I wish you would act your class, act like a lady instead of a peasant.'
'Class' Lilith sneered under her breath.
'What!?'
'Nothing' Lilith replied clearly. 'I'm sorry sir.'

‘I have a good mind to have you beaten’ the teacher went on. ‘This is a very serious crime. You do know that only the most important select few are allowed to be here?’
‘Yes sir.’
‘You know that only the high lords and ladies are allowed to be here?’
‘Yes sir.’
‘And students are not.’
‘No sir.’
‘If the headmaster knew about this…’ the teacher went on, completely ignoring Joseph. He pursed his lips, puffing himself out, his cheeks growing red in anger. ‘You should be beaten. You deserve to be beaten. But lords don’t beat ladies; I will have to think of a more fitting punishment for you.’ He waved her away arrogantly, like one would do a servant. ‘Get out of my sight and return to your class.’
Lilith bowed her head submissively, as was expected behaviour from a student towards a teacher. She carefully walked past him, heading to the doors of the library.
‘You too Joseph’ the teacher snapped, as if noticing him for the first time. ‘You shouldn’t be here. Make your absence swift.’
Joseph automatically dipped his head, moving quickly away from the teacher. As he passed Lilith, he couldn’t resist one last hurtful comment while he had the chance.
‘Freak’ he muttered under his breath as he overtook her, striding across the marble floor towards the entrance of the library.
His voice was low, but Lilith heard it clear, and she knew that even if the teacher behind heard it clearly too, he would have pretended he didn’t.
Lilith reached the doors, pausing with her hand on the cold dark wood. She glanced into the library once last time, feeling a deep sorrow in her heart. It was a beautiful place, with an impossibly high ceiling made only of glass. Natural sunlight spilled into every corner of the room, lighting up the red and brown and black pattered diamond floor.
She didn’t know when she would see the place again, if she would ever get the chance to see it again.
And then she noticed the teacher, standing a distance away glaring at her.
She dropped her gaze, and left through the doors.

High lords and ladies Lilith thought to herself. *What is class in a world like this? Why is so much importance placed on breeding?*
Lilith thought then of the high lords and ladies, the very purest, richest, most successful in society, with statuses within the city that nearly matched the king and queen themselves. The most obnoxious, selfish and arrogant people in the world, groomed to be blind to everything beyond their own desires. People who were physically unable to understand or even see those in poverty who suffered, those who were not so lucky in life as they.
She sighed, standing upon the stage and staring back at the many faces before her. Her punishment had been to stand upon the stage with the teacher, and balance several books on her head for two and a half hours. If she lost concentration, and one of the books were to fall, one of the other students in the room were to endure the same punishment beside her. She

didn't want that to happen, she was unpopular enough as it was, and so, she stood there, as still as she could, and waited for time to go by.
One of the faces before her was that of Joseph's. He sneered up at her regularly as he continued on with his work.
Lilith sighed again, eyes sliding about the room as she looked for something to take her interest and make time pass quicker. The room the classes took place in were very large, and often one teacher would teach nearly a hundred students. All the chairs and tables faced the stage, the ones at the back higher than the ones at the front so that everyone could see.
Lilith sighed some more. She was used to this punishment, or at least as used to this sort of treatment as one could have been. This was not the first time she had to endure this. Lilith dared a glanced to the side of her, and towards the teacher who sat at the podium in the centre of the stage, the same one who had given her this punishment. He glared at her briefly, before returning to his papers.
There was not a friendly face amongst any of them, save for one. One of the few friends she had, a young girl seventeen years in age, the same age as her. Her name was Victoria. She smiled uncertainly at Lilith, and Lilith smiled back, more encouragingly. Victoria returned to her work.
Lilith let her attention drift away, and her eyes began to glaze over, the books on her head still balanced perfectly still.
Time slowly ticked away.

When at last her ordeal was over, Lilith was allowed to leave with the rest of the class, once she was given permission by the teacher. Once everyone else had left.
She took the books from her head, placing them on the stage and walking carefully past the teacher, avoiding his glare.
She moved through the large expanse of the school, through its many halls and long corridors, and outside into the glorious awaiting sunlight.
She breathed a sigh of relief. It felt good to be out in the sunlight again.
Lilith looked at the world around her.
The city she lived in was the capital, and the largest city for miles around. It was congested, and in places filthy. The air was the first offense to those not very well acquainted to city life, especially *this* city life. Day and night great factories churned black smoke and sick air into the atmosphere, but one became accustomed to the dirt they breathed in. After a time, one stopped noticing it altogether. There were many building crowded here into this little area of land, and the streets were very narrow. Many large towers and tall building grew from its cement; the taller richer buildings were built in the centre. The not so tall buildings were built further away from the centre, and the poorest buildings, the dank and squalor homes, were at the very edges. These were the poor quarters, where those without money lived in filth, scraping a living at the edges of humanity.
The city was built in a roughly circular shape, and at a distance, because of the way the towers were positioned, looked like a cone, with the filthy poorer houses scattered in a disordered manner around the edges.

Many whispered of that dangerous place, where the desperate would do anything to survive. The richer folk simply adored to spill terrible tales of the poorer outer quarters, speaking of it as if it were another world, and its inhabitants aliens. Or mutants.

Or freaks. Just like Lilith.

She then glanced back at the university behind her. It was a large building, the front was made almost entirely of glass, and there was a great tower at its head, growing tall into a point that nearly touched the sky.

'Very soon' Lilith whispered to the building. 'I will gaze upon you for the last time.'

She turned her back on that hateful place where she had suffered so much scorn, and crossed its large grassy grounds to the main gate which sat at the end of a wide road. The richer more arrogant students that thought they were above walking waited on the steps before the school, as horses and carriages lined to pick them up.

Lilith left the grounds, passing through the tall iron gates that were left open. Once all the students had left, the gates would be locked, and the school would fall silent.

Lilith stepped out into the streets, glancing around her. It was a crowded place, like the rest of the city. The centre rarely suffered quiet streets, even after dark.

Around her the other students were milling out of the school grounds, each separating and going their own ways home.

Lilith heard a disturbance then, glancing to the side she saw a crowd of young men, standing with their backs to her in a circle facing inwards. Lilith tilted her head, trying to get a better view. Within the circle was another young man, who appeared to be crouching. One of the men in the circle raised his voice in hostility, but Lilith couldn't hear his words over the crowd. She watched as the figure pushed the one in the middle, shoving him to the side.

Lilith suddenly recognised the figure that had pushed the other, turning on her heel she strode briskly up to him.

'Joseph!'

He turned as the sound of her voice, just as she walked up to him. Lilith shoved him roughly to the side, causing him to stumble.

'What are you doing?' Joseph shot back.

'Enough of this' Lilith demanded. 'Who do you think you are to treat another this way?'

Joseph glowered back at her, but Lilith wouldn't bend, not under his glare, nor the glare of the other young men that had participated.

Within the centre of the circle, the victim watched in silence, still upon one knee.

'You overstep your mark' Joseph growled, stepping towards her.

Lilith didn't move, standing proudly, fearlessly before the men before her. Any other girl would surely have fled in terror by now. Young girls these days were so weak.

'You overstep *your* mark' Lilith repeated back to Joseph.

Joseph tensed, growing furious at her audacity. But Lilith only glared back at him, challenging him. She saw his fists clench.

'Go on' she whispered. 'Strike me now. I know you desire it.'

She saw as Joseph gritted his teeth. He glanced about him suddenly, realising their little scene had drawn a considerable amount of attention. People walking by had stopped now, to watch the events unfold before them, between the young girl and the young man she confronted.

'Do it' Lilith whispered to Joseph. 'I dare you.'

Joseph snarled at her, backing away as he felt the eyes of the crowd around him. ‘You will pay for this’ he promised her. ‘Mark my word.’
He turned sharply away from her and stormed away. The circle broke, and the other men followed after him, muttering under their breaths and glaring at her as they walked away.
Lilith relaxed, glancing down to the victim still kneeling beside her. And at one glance, she saw why he had been teased so.
He was from the poor quarters. She could tell from his dress.
‘Are you alright?’ she spoke to him.
The poor man glanced up at her with large eyes. Even his skin was dirty. There were smudges on his cheeks and forehead that looked like coal dust.
Lilith extended a hand for him to take. The stranger stared at her for a moment; Lilith could almost hear the thoughts passing through his mind. Perhaps he feared another trick; perhaps he thought that she too was teasing him. But after a time, he accepted. Taking Lilith by the hand, she helped him up.
‘I'm sorry about them’ Lilith said to him. ‘We are not all the same here.’
‘As I see’ the young man said speaking at last.
Lilith blinked slowly, taking in the stranger’s features. It was then that Lilith noticed that beneath the shabby clothes and soot, the young man was handsome.
‘What's your name?’
‘William’ the stranger answered. ‘What's yours?’
‘Lilith.’
‘Oh. That’s an interesting name.’
‘That’s what most people say’ Lilith smiled humourlessly. ‘Most people make fun of me because of it.’
‘That’s terrible.’
Lilith smiled again weakly. ‘There are many things that are terrible here’ she said. ‘Many things that are wrong.’
William didn’t answer.
‘What are you doing here?’
‘I came here to look at the school’ William said turning his back to her to see it. ‘Where I live, it is only whispered about. It is spoken as if it were a myth, and not a real place in the city we live.’
‘Hm.’ Lilith closed her eyes. ‘It’s nothing special.’
‘That’s easy for you to say’ William answered back, not turning to her, but keeping his eyes upon the school, drinking in its glorious sights. ‘You go here often, it’s normal for you. But to me…someone who has no such privileges…..’ he fell silent.
Suddenly he turned back to her, a big cheesy grin on his face.
‘I thank you for your help’ he said suddenly. ‘And it was nice to meet you. It’s nice to know that not all rich folk are the same.’
‘Wait!’ Lilith called after him as he began to scamper off. ‘Are you going to be alright?’
He glanced back at her confidently, standing tall and proud, despite not fitting in. ‘Don’t you worry about me. I know these streets.’ He watched her for a moment, considering her. ‘I hope we meet again.’

He swiftly left, slipping into the crowd. Some still stood and stared, but most had continued on, grumbling in disappointment that the confrontation had boiled down to nothing. Though they would never admit it, it was not only the poor who enjoyed confrontation and violence.
It was only a short time that Lilith had to think about William, before she was pounced on by her friend. One of the few she had.
'That was so brave! Are you alright?'
Lilith turned towards Victoria. Small in stature, her dirty blonde hair was tied in pigtails and styled in big curls.
'Those ones are you cruel' she scowled, referring to Joseph and his gang. 'They swarm around like dogs and act like such wretches. I hope they didn't hurt or frighten you.'
'Those fools' Lilith scoffed. 'They could never frighten me. They are nothing.'
'Oooohhh' Victoria grabbed her arm firmly. 'I wish I could have the confidence you do, I would be so much better off I'm sure.'
'I'm not so sure myself' Lilith said raising an eyebrow at her in amusement. 'For a start you would get yourself in far more trouble.'
'Hmm' Victoria hummed. 'I suppose you're right' she said curtly. 'Now. Do you still want to come with me to the streets to see the fireworks? You didn't forget about my invitation did you?'
'Oh' Lilith said. In truth she had completely forgotten. 'Yes, of course I'll come. I just need to tell my fa…' she broke off. Lilith smiled suddenly. 'Yes' she said again, composing herself. 'I'll come.'
'Wonderful!' Victoria cried clapping her hands gleefully. 'Oh this will be so much fun.'

That night when the world had darkened, the sky lit up in a flurry of exploding lights.
The streets were crammed with people, out enjoying the celebration. It was the start of the New Year, and the first day of summer. From here on, life was to get better for everyone, until winter came around once more.
Lilith ran through the streets, hand in hand with Victoria, running from one place to the next. There was no single open space where people had to celebrate, for the streets throughout the city were so narrow. And so the celebration happened everywhere.
It seemed on every corner there was something happening. Fireworks being set off, dances, music, magical performances that would awe the children and make the adults gasp in surprise. This was one of the few nights in the year when the rich folk would tolerate gypsies. With their absurd dresses and bright colours and excessive gold jewellery, it all offended the rich folk. Even their fortune telling and the way they constantly travelled was an insult. But tonight, tonight was a night to rejoice, and be happy.
Lilith skipped past a group of them, loudly playing their violins and beating their drums jovially as many other of them danced in the streets. Lilith even saw some of the animals that accompanied them. A donkey, a skinny dog, a goat, all of which wore jewellery of their own, hoops that pierced their and rings around their necks.
'Come with me' Victoria called over the noise, pulling Lilith with her as she went.
They went to a corner of the street where smaller fireworks were being set off, those that didn't reach high into the sky like the others, those that barely reached the top of the buildings.

They jumped upon a low wall, leaning on a tall lamppost and jumping up to grab the sparks as they fell. Nearby a group of young boys ran around the feet of their elders, waving around sparklers.
For many hours the celebration went on, late into the night, and slowly, the people became more and more drunk, and slowly, the streets began to empty. Began to quieten.
When they deemed it appropriate, the gypsies departed, as quickly as they had arrived.
'Victoria' Lilith said quietly, shaking her friend.
'Hm?'
'It's getting late. 'We should go home now.'
Victoria sat up, rubbing her eyes. She had drunk a small amount of wine, and had fallen asleep at the foot of one of the lampposts.
'What time is it?' Victoria groaned.
'I don't know.'

They walked through the now quieter parts of the streets, and all was silent. Lilith held Victoria around the shoulders as they went. She was still very tired, and a little tipsy, stumbling more than once in the dark alley.
There was very little light at this time, but Lilith knew this way well, and she walked bolding, moving Victoria with her.
It was only a short time they walked, when there was suddenly movement before them, and Lilith tensed as a shadowing figure appeared ahead. At first Victoria had not noticed it. Lilith stopped, watching as it approached.
'What's wrong?' Victoria mumbled. She then glanced forwards, gasping as the shadow loomed closer.
'Joseph?' Lilith said as it came into clearer view. 'Is that you?'
Lilith heard movement and quiet footsteps behind her. She glanced around, seeing three more figures, in the dark they appeared only as black silhouettes. Looking forward again, Lilith saw that three more figures had joined Joseph. Beside her Victoria began to shake. Lilith let go of her, straightening up.
'What are you going to do?' she asked firmly.
'I'm going to teach you a little lesson' Joseph spoke calmly to her, gliding forwards and using a finger tip to lift her chin. He began to walk around her, still touching her chin so that she always faced him.
'At least let Victoria go.'
'I'm not going to do anything you want me to' Joseph answered arrogantly. 'Maybe this will be a good lesson for her as well.'
He completed one circle around her, withdrawing his hand.
'The teachers have failed to control you' Joseph said. 'I won't.'
Lilith threw her head back laughing then, an act that seemed to surprise not only Joseph, but the surrounding figures as well.
'Listen to yourself' she said calming. 'You really do think you're so high and mighty.' She sighed, becoming still again, staring at him hard. 'You are nothing.'
He went to hit her, but Lilith caught his wrist in the air.
'You will *not* strike me again' she growled at him.

She stumbled forwards suddenly, as one of the figures hit her across the back of the head with a hard object. Lilith fell to her knees, as Victoria screamed in fear beside her. But the attention of all the figures was not on her, but on Lilith.
'Listen to *yourself*' Joseph cried throwing his hands out. 'Even out here where nobody can help you, you still mock me.' He grabbed her face, forcing it upwards to his. 'You just don't know when to keep your mouth shut do you?'
'I was just going to say the same about you.'
'Ooohh' he said shaking his head at her audacity. 'Thank you for giving me a reason to do what I'm about to do.'
He let go of her, backing away.
'Hey!' called one of the boys around them.
Lilith glanced up.
'What is it?' Joseph asked irritant, turning back to the one who had spoken.
'Look.'
Joseph looked to where his friend was pointing. His heard skipped a beat in his chest at what he saw.
A shadowy figure was standing on one of the rooftops, wearing a grotesque mask of some insect. The figure did not move, it only stood there, watching the small group in the street below.
'There's another one' a second called.
Joseph glanced all around him, seeing more and more figures appearing from the night, from all sides they surrounded them on the rooftops. Each wore vile masks that covered their faces, masks of deformed and hideous beasts like pigs and sloths and bizarre sea creatures.
Joseph let his eyes slide around him, waiting to see what would happen. But the figures did nothing.
They only stood. They only stared.
A twinge of fear trickled through him them, as he realised how many of them there were. Twenty? Maybe even thirty?'
'Let's go' he mumbled to his friends.
They quickly departed. Joseph spared one last hateful glanced towards Lilith before following them.
When they were gone, Lilith turned her attention back towards these new figures, wondering what would happen next, and ignoring Victoria's hysterical sobs.
The figures crept forwards, closing the circle. They leant over the edge of the rooftops, almost creating a canopy with their bodies.
And then one of them leapt down into the street. Lilith watched still kneeling, as the figure approached.
The figure lifted their hands, removing their ghastly rats face mask, and revealing their identity.
'William?'
He smiled smugly at her, holding the mask under his arm.
'Are you alright?' he asked, extending a hand to her.

She took it, rising again to her feet. Beside her another one of the masked figures went over to Victoria, who was kneeling and holding her arms tightly over her ears, still shaking in terror and daring not to open her eyes.
The figure touched her shoulder gently, and Victoria risked a glance up.
She screamed when she saw the hideous squid mask. Slapping the figure's hand away she rose to her feet, screaming and running away.
'Leave her!' William commanded the figure, who made to follow her. 'You will only frighten her more.'
The figure removed their mask, and Lilith was surprised to see a girl, far younger than she would have guessed.
'Stupid little rich girl' she complained. 'Run home like a frightened rabbit.' She glanced towards Lilith. 'I hope this one's as good as you say she is.'
'She is' William answered confidently.
Lilith felt a strange sensation inside her stomach, one she was not used to, and she wondered what the two were talking about.
'What have you been saying about me?'
William smiled at her.
'One good deed deserves another' he grinned slyly. 'Thank you!' he spoke loudly to the others surrounding. 'You may leave us alone now.'
'But it is social suicide to be seen alone with a man you are not related or married to' Lilith said automatically.
'And you care about these silly rules the rich fabricate?'
It was Lilith's turn to smile now.
'I suppose not.'
She suddenly noticed that all the other figures had gone now, save but one.
'You too' William said to the young girl.
'Awwww' she whined. Huffing, she replaced her mask, hiding her face once again. 'Don't be gone too long, you know how mother worries.'
She turned and leapt up, grabbing onto the protruding bricks and window sills and climbing with surprising grace, up the side of the building. She disappeared over the rooftop and out of sight.
'My sister' William shrugged apologetically. 'She is a tricky one. Now' he said, extending an arm for Lilith to take. 'Would the lady mind if I escorted her home?'

Chapter Two
That Day

They walked slowly through the streets, Lilith holding onto William's arm as they went.
'So why the masks?' Lilith asked him.
'Oh these things?' William said, lifting the rat mask and smiling down at it. 'They're beautiful aren't they?'
'They're monstrous.'

William chuckled to himself.
‘We cause all sorts of mischief with these things’ he went on. ‘They conceal our identity, and the rich folk can’t catch us.’
‘How much trouble do you cause?’ Lilith asked dubiously.
‘So much’ William gleamed. ‘We are often trodden on and overlooked by the rich folk. They think themselves better than us because they have money. But what is a man without his wealth?’ he asked Lilith.
‘I don’t know’ she replied.
William paused, glancing sideways to her. ‘He is just a man.’
She smiled.
‘I'm sorry they treat you the way they do. All of you. It’s just not fair.’
‘Don’t be sorry’ he said, walking on. ‘Us poor folk, we give as good as we get.’
‘And so it should be’ Lilith nodded approvingly.
William chuckled again at her boldness.
‘So’ Lilith went on, ‘what is your sister’s name?’
‘Claudia. She is one of five.’
‘Five sibling?’
‘Five sisters’ William corrected. ‘We have large families in the poor quarters. It takes a lot of hands to make the world go by; it takes a lot of work to survive. But we manage.’ He looked over her head suddenly. ‘I hope your friend will be ok.’
‘I'm sure she will be’ Lilith replied. ‘I just hope she doesn’t fall and sprain her ankle, she *is* very delicate.’
‘Where do you live?’ William asked her.
‘It’s just this way’ Lilith answered.
They walked for a short time, and before long, Lilith reached her home.
It was a large building, with large windows, a straight path to the front door, and well maintained grounds around. Lilith stopped at the entrance gates.
‘Thank you for helping me’ she said.
‘You did the same for me’ William bowed to her. ‘I was merely repaying the favour.’
Lilith turned from him, slipping through the gates and closing them after her. She met William’s gaze through the bars as she clicked the lock in place. Walking slowly up the path towards her home, she glanced back behind her when she reached the front door, but William was gone.
She entered her home, finding everything completely dark and still. But there was life here.
‘Lilith?’ came a gentle voice.
Lilith recognised it as the voice of one of the servants of the house, her favourite, it was Betty.
‘What are you still doing awake?’ Lilith asked her in a whisper, reluctant to break the silence of the room around her, reluctant more so to wake your father.
‘I was concerned when you didn’t return home’ the maid told her. ‘I was worried. So I waited.’
‘There was no need’ Lilith replied. ‘I can take care of myself.’
‘I'm sorry your father didn’t wait for you’ Betty went on.

‘I didn’t expect him to’ Lilith answered. She smiled encouragingly. ‘Thank you for your concern, but you should go to bed now, it’s late.’
‘Where you up watching the fireworks?’
Lilith nodded.
‘They were wonderful weren’t they?’ Betty beamed. ‘I saw some of them from the window.’
Lilith smiled at her.
‘Anyway’ Betty said straightening up. ‘I will see you in the morning.’
Lilith watched her go. Betty, like a few of the other servants, had sleeping quarters of her own, only modest dwellings within the main house. Lilith’s father was well off for money, but harder times had forced him to lay off many of the servants, and now there was only a few. The extra work they had to do often meant they stayed later, and travelling the streets on such dark nights was not safe. And so on some nights, here they stayed.
Lilith crossed the large entrance hall and ascended the stairs, heading to her room, walking carefully past her father’s room as she went.
She closed her bedroom door, and at last took of her dress, the dreaded uniform her school expected her to wear. Draping it across the back of a chair and drawing her curtains shut quickly before she went to bed. Her four poster bed was large, the room where she slept was large, and the windows draughty. Many would have found it cold in the spacious house where she lived. Many would have found the nights chilly and sought extra blankets, but for Lilith, it was perfect.
She slept deeply and without disturbance that night, woken the following morning by the sun as it lit up the world, shining through the crack in the curtains.
She woke early, taking off her long white nightdress and glancing only briefly at the tall mirror beside her bed to see if she was presentable once she put on her uniform. Her school dress was a modest knee-length dress coloured light brown and white. Though the city churned out so much pollution into the air, the white often turned out to be more grey in colour. Lilith left her hair down, another thing on the long laundry list of things that people frowned at her for. It was expected for ladies from richer families to behave and dress a certain way, and a lady who did not tie her hair up was considered to be unconventional. Like a poor person, or a tramp.
Lilith drifted over to the heavy curtains that held back the sun, throwing them apart and letting the light to warm her room. She opened the glass double doors that led onto the balcony, letting in the gentle breeze that brought the morning air.
But it was far from refreshing. Had she been merely visiting the city she would have instantly noticed the pollution, thick like silt in the air. But it was not the air that made her wrinkle her nose and close the doors again, it was the noise. For good measure she drew the curtains shut again, marching from the room and heading downstairs for breakfast.
Lilith sat at the long table without saying a word. Immediately one of the servants brought her a cooked breakfast. Lilith stared down at it.
‘Can I have some more black pudding?’
The servant scurried off to comply.
To the other servant, the only one left she asked. ‘Can I have some orange juice?’
‘But there is some on the table’ the servant bowed.
‘I don’t want that one.’

The servant scurried off to comply.
Lilith knew they would be a short while. The kitchen was on the other side of the house. Now it was only herself and her father.
Lilith waited for a moment to see if he would speak. But he didn't. She didn't really expect him to. She would have cleared her throat loudly and obviously to get a reaction, except she had tried that in the past and knew it wouldn't work.
'Did you see the fireworks last night?'
'No' her father answered without looking up from his newspaper.
'Where you wondering where I was?'
'Hmm.'
'Will you always be indifferent to me?'
'Hmm.'
Lilith sighed deeply as the servants returned; bringing to her the things she didn't want. She accepted them politely and ate her breakfast slowly while staring at her father. He was young and handsome and finely dressed with black hair. Both her parents were very young when they had her, younger to have a child than was normally accepted in society. But that was not the reason her mother had rejected her.
When her father did finally speak to her, Lilith was so surprised she hadn't registered what he said.
'I said' Ken replied sternly with a frown, irritated that he was having to repeat himself. 'Have you chosen which path you're going to take?'
Lilith looked back at her father, immediately wishing he hadn't spoken.
'No' she replied shortly.
Ken opened his mouth, about to speak. He then changed his mind, sighing and returning his attention to his newspaper.
Lilith watched him sadly, feeling lost, and alone, feeling as if there was no place for her in this world.
She looked down at her plate, thinking.
Oh lords. That day is today? What should I do?

Chapter Three
Rejection

The day after the New Year celebration, was the day that many took their first steps forward as mature adults, and chose what goals they wished to pursue in life, which path they wanted to take. Each in their final year would go to school for the last time, and be placed in a category. Some would choose to be lawyers, doctors, or bankers. But for females, their role was mostly limited to one called 'women of the houses'. This meant for most, marrying, having children, becoming midwives, or caring for children in other ways, such as education. It was not unheard of for a woman to become a lawyer, but it was far harder for a woman to become one, and with such a rigid society as one the rich lived in, even if one succeeded, it was frowned upon. And so, they were pigeon holed, and forced to live up to specific

expectations. A great cloud descended upon Lilith as she made her reluctant way to her school on that day, for what would be the last time.
She stopped before its gates, staring up at the great glass-fronted building that grew tall into the sky.
'Hello Lilith' came a voice.
She suddenly noticed a tall and slender female leaning against one of the columns of the open gate.
'Have you made your decision?' her friend Anna asked. 'Which path you're going to take?'
Lilith stared at her, as she leant back with her arms folded.
'I don't know' Lilith replied meekly. 'I don't know…'
Anna lifted her head curiously at her reply, confused at the weak tone of her voice.
'Lilith.'
Lilith turned from Anna, and towards Victoria who had spoken.
'Victoria. You're alright. I was worrying that last night….'
'We can no longer be friends.'
Lilith broke off her sentence, letting her words hang in the air as she slowly registered what Victoria had said to her.
'What?' she whispered. 'But…'
'I'm sorry' Victoria replied harshly, shoulders tense and fists shaking. 'But you're too different from the rest of us. You will get me hurt. Get me in trouble…I…I'm just…'
'I thought you wanted to be strong' Lilith told her in a flat voice.
'I…I'm sorry.'
Victoria turned and marched away, not looking back. Behind her Anna looked on in shock.
'What was that all about?' she asked.
Lilith did not answer her, did not look at her.
'Lilith?' Anna asked with concern. 'Are you alright?'
'Yes' Lilith replied without emotion. 'I am fine.'
She walked off, before Anna had a chance to speak. For once she was glad to enter the school, and blend in with the crowd where she was hardly noticed. An hour or so later, everyone in her year had gathered in the largest hall in the school, and the ceremony began, the ceremony in which each would choose their path, their course for the future.

Lilith sat near the back, and watched with dead eyes as the ritual dragged on. When Joseph's name was called out, many of the students began to clap, and when he chose the profession of lawyer, many began to cheer. He was a well liked young man, and very popular amongst his social class. And so, one by one, each of the nearly two hundred names of the students gathered in the hall were called out, until at last, Lilith's name was called.
Her attention slowly began to focus on the teacher standing on the stage before her as he waited for her to approach the stage. The entire hall fell into utter silence, as they waited to see what she would pick.
Lilith slowly rose from her seat; all eyes were upon her as she gradually made her way across the hall and ascended the steps, coming to stand before her teacher. The teacher was barely able to hide his disdain for her as he handed Lilith a piece of card with rounded corners. Each student had their own. It was a document of their highest achievements accomplished since

the time they were able to speak. It was a document that would follow them wherever they went, for the rest of their lives, and one without which, would be impossible for anyone in upper class to achieve anything of value. Without this document, further education, decent employment, even marriage was impossible for the upper class. Without this document, the life of a wealthy individual born into a distinguished family, no matter how rich, would be null and void. Until this point, only teachers and parents had authority to hold them, now the document belonged to whom it concerned.

The teacher gestured to the small desk behind him, where lay a variety of different stamps, each indicating a path.

'Chose your mark' the teacher told her solemnly.

Lilith looked down at the document she held, in the top corner, was an empty circle, where she was expected to place a stamp indicating the profession or role she wished to pursue. She looked down at the table, seeing the many stamps lined up. The two stamps that bore the most ink, the ones that were most used, were the ones symbolising bankers, and mothers. The two most sought after roles.

'Chose your mark' the teacher repeated, his patience growing thin.

Lilith approached the desk uncertainly, staring at each possibility in her life, lined up on a table before her. To fall into the category of 'women of the houses' and marry a man for his wealth and be expected to bear children just as society expected, or be expected to help others birth their own children and be constantly asked why you don't have your own yet. Or to fall into any of the other categories, which society expected only men to pursue, and be frowned upon, and thought about with distain, just as she had been her entire life.

These were her choices.

'If you are unsure of your choice' the teacher spoke up, breaking her thoughts, 'will you let me choose for you?'

Lilith glanced up at the man with thought. He would surely pick the role of mother for her.

'Well?' the teacher asked her. 'Do you wish me to pick?'

Lilith held the document close to her chest.

'What is your choice?' the teacher asked becoming angry now. 'Will you not speak?'

'Here is my choice' Lilith answered, speaking at last.

The teacher waited.

Lilith suddenly threw her arms apart, each half of the document in each hand. She had torn it in half.

Her action caused an immediate reaction within the hall. Students and teachers alike gasped in shock and cried out loud in exclamation, some even rising to their feet.

All the scorn she had suffered over the years, all the many slights and hardships came crashing down on her as Lilith lifted her eyes glaring at the teacher before her.

'Here is my choice' she said again, speaking loudly.

She straightened, throwing the two halves of the torn document at his chest.

'I will not be pigeon holed!' she screamed at him. 'My choices in life are mine to make in my own time! I will not be bound!'

The entire hall gasped in succession once again at her audacity. The teacher before her looked on only in utter shock and disbelief. It was clear, that he had not expected this, even from her. This day would surely be one that many would speak of for years to come.

Lilith turned on her heel, marching out of the hall as quickly as she could without breaking into a run, ignoring the stares and rumours that were already beginning.
When she was outside in the welcoming breeze, then she ran as fast as she could, heading home.

When she burst through the doors, she found her father standing with his back to her in the dining room. He was reading a letter.
'Oh Lilith' he said in a weak voice, not turning, but knowing by instinct that it was her. 'What have you done?'
'What?' Lilith gasped.
Ken turned to her. 'A courier has just given me this letter from the school. You are deemed clinically insane. They are coming to take you away.'
'What?!' Lilith gasped again. She slammed the door behind her, facing her father again. 'But how…?' And then she realised.
They must have sent the letter before she even arrived at school that day. It was the first day in her life she was considered an adult, and the first day in her life she could legally be tried and punished as an adult.
'Oh my lord' Lilith whispered, feeling sick to her stomach. 'They've planned this…'
There was a sudden and heavy banging on the front door.
'It's them' Ken mumbled, eyes piercing the door. 'Hurry' he said to his daughter. 'You can escape through the back door.'
Lilith trembled as she returned her father's gaze. She searched for something, anything that was inside him that he felt for her. But she found nothing. She considered speaking, but closed her mouth swiftly, running past him without a word and heading to the back door.
Ken answered the door.
'Where is Lilith?' asked a gruff looking official.
'She's escaped through the back door' Ken replied. 'Hurry, you might still catch her.'

Lilith ran and hid, taking cover whenever she saw an officer of the law. She travelled as fast as she dared, heading to the one place she knew no one would try to look for her.
The outer quarter of the city. The poor quarter.
It was nightfall when she reached it. She wandered through the streets, lost and alone and in despair.
Lilith threw herself onto her knees in the dirty open streets, throwing her head back in agony and wailing in misery. Bawling into her hands, not caring who heard her.
She was found a short time later by a figure.
Lilith glanced up through red and teary eyes, blinking uncertainly at the figure before her she didn't at first recognise. But she recognised his voice when he spoke.
'Lilith?'
It was William.
She fell into his arms as he knelt before her, and he held her there for many minutes, before helping her to her feet, and taking her away.
He took her home, and introduced her to his extended family.

‘Can she stay’ William said to his mother. ‘Please. She has nowhere else to go.’
The mother considered Lilith with a frown, Williams many brothers and sisters waiting eagerly for her answer.
‘You can stay here’ the mother said. ‘As long as you help with the choirs, you can stay.’
Lilith looked up hopefully at the kindly woman, as the many children within the tiny room began to cheer and chatter excitedly.
‘A new sister!’ they cried. ‘What fun!’
Lilith surveyed her dingy surroundings with uncertainty, as William squeezed her shoulder encouragingly.
‘It’s ok’ he said to her. ‘It’s going to be alright.’

Back at her old home, Lilith’s mother returned after many years of being absent.
‘Is it true?’ she said to her husband. ‘Is she really gone?’
‘Yes’ Ken replied with a smile. ‘Beatrice my love…now we can truly be together.’
Tears of joy ran down her cheeks. ‘At last… she whispered. ‘I have waited for so long.’
They slowly embraced each other

PART 2
Eight years later

Chapter Four
The Children

Lilith sat upon the steps before the house, looking out onto the street as the children played. On her lap she held a baby, who pulled at the shawl Lilith wore around her plain brown dress, while chewing on Lilith’s long grey hair.
‘Now stop that’ Lilith scolded, pulling the damp patch of hair away. ‘You mustn’t put things in your mouth.’
The small group of children playing before her, aged between three and eleven played loudly, running back and forth and screaming. Some played with tops which needed a string to spin, others played tag in groups, and some played throwing balls to one another. One of the running children suddenly fell, cutting his knee he began to cry.
Lilith rose, still holding the baby and walking up to.
‘Poor thing’ she cooed as she knelt to examine him. ‘Are you alright?’
The child balled his fists as he sobbed, rubbing his eyes before leaning forward and hugging Lilith around her neck.
‘It’s just a graze’ Lilith comforted, ‘you’ll be ok.’
‘Stupid Edward’ one of the less sympathetic boys said coming over. ‘That’s what you get for being so slow.’

‘It’s not my fault’ Edward continued to cry, ‘you pushed me.’
‘Did not!’
‘Now stop fighting’ Lilith said firmly. ‘No one pushed anyone, it was an accident. Don’t start bickering over nothing.’ She spoke now to the injured Edward. ‘Come and sit with me and Bella on the steps.’
The baby began to gurgle in amusement, not understanding what was going on, but being amused all the same.
‘Ok’ Edward replied pathetically, taking Lilith’s hand and allowing her to lead him away.
‘Baby!’ the unsympathetic boy called.
‘Stop it Jack’ Lilith snapped, ‘or I’ll tell your mother how naughty you’ve been.’
The boy instantly fell silent.
‘Come on’ Lilith spoke kindly to Edward as he sat next to her. ‘I’ll tell you a story.’
‘A story!’ cried another child named Lucy. ‘I love your stories!’
On hearing this all the other children came over, sitting around her like they were her disciples.
Lilith chuckled at this, smiling down at them.
‘Where should I begin?’
‘Tell us one of your stories’ another child added unhelpfully.
‘Is it true you used to live in the rich place?’ another asked.
‘I did’ Lilith nodded.
‘Why are you here then?’ Jack asked. ‘Didn’t you like it?’
‘I've heard this story before’ an older child sighed.
‘Well I haven’t’ Jack snapped, jerking his head round and glaring at the one who had spoken.’
‘Enough children’ Lilith spoke loudly, interrupting them before they could start arguing. ‘I will tell you of this. I did used to live in the rich quarters, a place in the centre of the city. It is beautiful, but the people are selfish. But…I have lived in many more places than that. I know much of the world, and of life. I have learnt, I have travelled, and I have seen far more of this world than many ever will.’ She drew a deep breath, casting her mind back to a past that was now far behind her. ‘I have seen princes and princesses, with cruel dictator parents; give their shoes to homeless children so that they might walk the streets without cutting their feet. I have seen complete strangers work together, whole cities unite to save the life of a single man, a man they do not know. And I have seen a man, in a death camp awaiting an unknown fate, at what would be the lowest point in his life. I saw him rise and stand to stare unflinching in the eyes of a powerful general, a man who could have ordered his death in a few short words. The man in that camp, at that moment in his life was most vulnerable, and yet he showed the most courage.’ She looked over the children. ‘I have lived many lives, seen may cultures, and learnt many skills in my short time in life, and I have important lessons to teach you, thinks you should learn and know. Things I myself have learnt. This is what I have to tell you. Happiness in life is not the fulfilment of what we wish for, but an appreciation for what we have, and overcoming great challenges makes life meaningful. The secret to happiness is acceptance, and good things come to those who work for it. In life, you create your own good. Have no time for regret, hate or fear. And remember, everyone means

something to someone else. One day, you will just be a memory. Live a life you are proud of, and if you desire to make a difference in the world, you must be bold enough to show it.'
'How come you've travelled so much?' Lucy asked.
'I was born to rich parents' Lilith explained. 'My mother didn't want me, and my father…he travelled far and wide to try to find another family who would take me, but he found none that were suitable.'
'Why didn't your parents want you?' another child piped up.
'Sometimes….' Lilith told her sadly, 'parents realise having a child was a mistake.'
'Why did they have you then?' the same child asked.
'I was born….different. My mother wanted a child, but rejected me after I was born.'
'Why?'
'Because my mother saw me as an abomination.'
'You look normal to me' the same child commented.
'I wasn't born the way I look' Lilith told them. 'You know, many believe that fallen angels are usurpers and betrayers of god, who have no place in heaven or on earth.'
'How come your father tried so hard to give you away?' the young Lucy asked.
My father couldn't find me a new home, and so….I spent the rest of my young life in this city with him, where I learnt at the *big* school. And that's where I met William. Shortly after that…I came here.'
'But why did you leave the rich quarters?' Edward asked. 'Didn't you like it?'
'I didn't fit in' Lilith answered simply.
'Where did it go wrong?' Lucy asked.
Lilith cast her mind back. Now that was a difficult question, it was so long ago. Where *did* it go wrong? Lilith remembered something then, a man once had asked her a similar question in the past, a rich young man, and one she disliked greatly. However his question had been phrased to hurt. *When did you stop acting normal?* He had asked. His name was Joseph, the one who used to tease and mock her for years.
Lilith explained.
'I had been going to school for years' she began. 'I was in maths class doing algebra, and then it hit me. *Why am I doing this?* And then I walked out. That was the beginning….'
'Lilith!'
Lilith glanced up to see a portly woman hobbling over towards her, puffing as she went.
Lilith smiled, rising as the woman approached.
'How was work?' Lilith asked as she handed the baby over to the woman.
'Busy as usual' the woman huffed as she smiled with exhaustion, cheeks rosy red. 'It'll be your turn soon, I hope the children didn't wear you out too much.'
'No more than usual.'
Other mothers were turning up out of the small crowd that had gathered as each headed home from work. It was midday, and many finished work at this time, many others would start work soon after. Slowly the children that had surrounded Lilith dispersed, each going to their own parents as one by one they appeared out of the crowd. Lilith wiped her brow, smiling at the faces of the parents as they went by, and then William came.
'The children seem fonder of you than ever' he remarked.
'I never had any siblings' Lilith shrugged. 'I feel I really missed out.'

‘You’d better hurry up’ William told her. ‘Don’t want to be late.’
Lilith quickly tied up her hair, tucking it away under her hat. She kissed William swiftly, before skipping off to follow the crowd that made their way towards the industrial parts of the outer circle to begin work.
Behind her Lilith didn’t see William sigh happily as he stared at the back of her bobbing head. Before long Lilith’s profile was lost in the mass of dark colours made up of the bodies of the poor. Only the rich could afford colour, and that was where Lilith was going to work, in a factory that produced clothes and fabrics for the rich. But she preferred her dark clothes, they helped her blend in, helped her remain unnoticed. Since the day she had first ran away, she had not been found, and had not seen her father since he received that letter, nor her mother. In those cases, it was a good thing, and Lilith was happy.

Chapter Five
Wings

Lilith worked hard that day, and the day after that, as she had been doing for many years. Life in the poor quarters was hard; physically for Lilith it had never been harder. But it had never been happier either, because she had William. She had found a man to love and who loved her in return, and with him, had gained a vast family.
One evening, returning home from a long day at work, she found that William had prepared a meal for her.
Sitting around the small table, lit only by a single candle in the middle, the two ate gratefully.
‘I love you so much’ William smiled warmly at her, eyes sparkling brightly in the flickering flame.
Lilith smiled widely back at her.
‘I love you’ she told him reaching forward to caress him, ‘…so much.’
He took her hand in his before she could withdraw; kissing it tenderly, Lilith felt his sweet breath upon her skin. He looked up at her deeply, eyes firm. Lilith returned his gaze unbreaking.
Her cheeks flushed. ‘William…’
He drew his chair back, rising with surety, taking her hand as he did so. Lilith rose with him. He pulled her close, running her fingers up her neck and through her hair, pushing her against the wall as he did so.
‘No’ Lilith whispered back.
William drew back slightly, but didn’t let go. His amber gaze bore into her as she drew her breath back.
‘Not until we’re married’ Lilith whispered to him. ‘I want our first moment together to be special.’
William smiled slowly, smiled kindly. ‘So do I’ he told her. ‘It’s just so hard to resist sometimes.’ He moved closer to her again. ‘I know I can’t have you yet’ he spoke into her ear in barely a whisper. ‘I just want a taste.’

Their sweet moment was all too brief as they were interrupted by heavy footfalls coming from down the stairs.
'Can't you two control yourselves?' one of William's sisters complained loudly as she came into view. 'God you can't keep your hands off each other. I only have to turn around and you're crawling over each other.'
'You exaggerate' William sighed in annoyance letting go of Lilith and turning to his sister. 'Why are you up? Go back to bed.'
'Can't sleep' Stephanie sang back annoyingly.
Lilith keeping her head low so that her grey hair fell about her face hiding her red cheeks, returned to the table to eat.
'Hey Lilith' Stephanie asked her. 'When are you two going to move in together in a place of your own?'
'Oh' Lilith said. 'Um…'
'We've nearly saved up enough' William told her shortly, taking his seat opposite Lilith. 'Then we can finally have some privacy.'
'Ew. Don't give me details. I don't want to know what filthy things you get up to.'
William groaned into his hand angrily.
'Now William' Lilith spoke kindly, smiling at his annoyance. 'She's just trying to tease you. Why do you make it so easy for her?'
'You haven't been living with her as long as I have' William sighed wearily.
There was suddenly a woman's scream coming from upstairs. The three of them tensed. Lilith ran upstairs instantly, swiftly followed by Stephanie and William. Lilith burst into one of the rooms.
She turned to Stephanie and William behind her.
'Get the midwife!'

It was late into the night that Lilith held the crying child in her arms. Looking down into the face of the little baby boy.
'He's beautiful' she smiled. Lilith glanced up towards the new mother, lying there exhausted.
'Here' she said handing the child back.
The mother took the child, holding him close, gazing down at the child with pride.
Lilith withdrew from the room, leaving the mother and baby to be fussed over by the many other family members crowded into the tiny room.
Lilith kissed William before she went to bed that night. As she slept, she dreamed of a memory, one that had happened long ago, but one she had not forgotten.

'Lilith, come here for a moment.'
Five years old, Lilith sat beside her father.
'You've been asking about your mother' Ken spoke, 'how your friends have mothers, but why yours isn't around.'
Lilith watched her father talk, listening silently.
'Well…' Ken went on. 'I think it's time I told you.'

The woman was in labour and in agony for many hours. The midwives ran about the room, calling to one another, bringing towels and trying to comfort her.
The husband waited outside the room nervously, listening to his wife's cries. When the baby was at last delivered, the midwives fell silent in uncertainty.
One of them handed the child to the mother. When she looked down at her baby, she recoiled in disgust.
'Get it away from me! It's a monster!'

'Father. Why am I so different?'
'You were born with a deformity' Ken replied to Lilith simply.
'But birds have the same deformity' Lilith asked her father. 'Why do people not hate them?'

Lilith woke the next morning early, with a heavy feeling in her heart.
She could not sleep. She rose and began work early that day.

Chapter Six
The Curse

The young girl leant out of the window, the wind whipping her blonde hair back from her face.
'Weeeeee!' she said delightedly, as the world rushed past her.
'Tiffany!'
The girl felt a pair of hands grab her by the waist and pull her back. She looked up to see Lilith frowning down at her.
'Don't do that' Lilith told her. 'It's dangerous.'
'But it's so fun!'
Lilith grabbed the girl lightly by the chin, lifting her face upwards as she glared sternly down at her. 'Do not' she said. 'Do that again.'
'Aaaawww' she whined. 'That's so boring.'
'What would your mother have to say to me if I had to pick you up in pieces from the side of the track? Hmm? She wouldn't best be please I image.'
'I wish I could climb to the roof' Tiffany talked animatedly. 'I would feel so much freer out there than stuck here in this carriage.'
'Well' Lilith said curtly, stepping back and brushing herself off. 'Wish all you like. But if I find you doing it, then you will wish you hadn't. Now go find something that is not dangerous to occupy yourself with until we get there.'
'Fine' Tiffany submitted. She turn-tailed and ran in the other direction, arms out wide like a bird. 'Weeeeeeeee' she said as she went.
'Silly child' Lilith chuckled to herself in affection as she watched her go.
'You certainly have a way with her' William said from behind her. 'Even her own mother can't stand her some days.'

‘It’s because I'm not as familiar to her as her mother is’ Lilith smiled to William. ‘If I saw her more often, I'm sure she would test my patience. Hello Ellie’ she said then to the young girl hanging off William’s back. ‘Are you having fun there?’
‘Yes’ the girl sniggered in glee. ‘William makes a good horse. Don’t you William?’ she said to him.
‘That does seem to be the case’ William said closing his eyes with a smile. ‘But like every horse that works for a long time, they get tired, and so am I.’
Ellie slid from off his shoulders, landing lightly on the floor.
‘Why don’t you play with Lizzie?’ William suggested. ‘I'm sure she would like some company to help her with her pictures.’
Ellie silently skipped over to Lizzie, who was the quieter of the three children. William and Lilith were left alone together in peace, at least for the meantime.
Lilith smiled to William, turning from him and resting her elbow on the open window, looking outwards, watching the world go by.
‘It’s so good to leave the city’ she said to him. ‘The air is so fresh out here. I've grown so used to the city air, I forget how polluted it is.’
‘We all do I'm sure’ William said, taking the seat opposite her. ‘And you're right. It is good to get out of the city.’
‘We should do it more often.’
‘And make a habit of it?’ William smirked. ‘One must still work. And these tickets aren’t exactly cheap.’
‘I know’ Lilith sighed wearily. ‘But still…one still wishes for these things.’
‘These things we cannot have’ William told her, leaning forward and resting his hand on hers. ‘At least not yet.’
Lilith’s eyes lit up at that.
‘I very much look forward to the time we are settled. Such a change of scene…I think I am in more need of it than I realised.’
William leant back in his seat.
‘We are both in need of it I think’ he said. ‘And the family can visit us. And all the children.’
‘What a full house we shall have’ Lilith beamed.
‘As it always has been’ William said. ‘As it always will be.’
‘Some things never change.’
‘Some things I wouldn’t ever wish to change.’ William glanced up at her. ‘I wish for this moment to last forever.’
‘*This* moment?’ Lilith asked teasingly. ‘Not the moment…after we move in and are settled?’
‘Well’ William submitted. ‘*That* moment would also be pleasant.’
They sat for a short time in silence, watching the trees wiz by and the hills further away pass more slowly.
‘Will we buy some animals?’ Lilith asked, breaking the silence.
‘Hm?’ William glanced up.
‘You know’ Lilith said. ‘Sheep. Chickens. Pigs.’
‘You can have peacocks if it makes you happy.’
Lilith pursed her lips, brow furrowed in displeasure.
‘How about’ William continued, ‘some caged foxes? Just like royalty have.’

‘We couldn’t afford caged foxes’ Lilith frowned. ‘And besides, why would I want some rare creature I couldn’t make use out of? That’s only the sort of thing rich toffs would waste their money on just for show.’
William smiled at her, resting his chin on his palm. ‘Sheep and chickens and pigs it is then’ he sighed.
‘Well we’ll have the land’ Lilith explained. ‘It would be a shame not to make use of it.’
‘Why don’t we get a cat?’ William suggested.
‘What for?’
‘To catch the mice that will steal the food we leave out for the pigs.’
‘I suppose…’ Lilith spoke slowly.
‘And a dog’ William said. ‘To protect us from travellers coming to rob us of our chickens.’
‘Lets’ Lilith interrupted briskly, ‘just see the place first. We might not even find it suited to our needs.’
They arrived at their destination, exiting the train and taking a horse and carriage the rest of the way.
‘My my’ William was saying as he counted the coins to pay the carriage driver. ‘It’s lucky we’re only doing this once, or else we wouldn’t have enough money to actually buy the house.’
‘Come now don’t complain’ Lilith said to him. ‘We’re here, and we arrived in one piece. Now we can at last see the place.’
‘Is that it over there?’ Ellie called loudly, sitting atop William’s shoulders.
William turned from the carriage as the driver climbed into the seat and sped away. The others gazed in awe at the unremarkable building at the end of the dirt road.
‘It’s so big!’ Tiffany cried out excitedly. ‘Will this really be your house?’ she asked Lilith beside her.
‘Yes’ Lilith smiled down at the child. ‘This will be our home.’
‘How will we see you if you live so far away?’ Tiffany asked.
‘We will buy some farm horses I'm sure’ William said.
‘Or some nice little ponies’ Lilith added. ‘Much cheaper than the standard horse.
‘We could even buy a little carriage so that we could fit all of you in’ William spoke to the children around him. ‘You could bring more of your brothers and sisters.’
‘I'm not bringing my smelly brother’ Ellie glowered. ‘Not him.’
‘Don’t be unkind’ William said sternly. ‘And stop pulling my ears.’
‘Come on’ Lilith whispered to the quiet Lizzie who clung to her side. ‘Let’s go have a look at this place.’
She took Lizzie’s hand, and they walked up the path towards the house, following Tiffany who had run off ahead.
It was by no means a large house, but it was a more than comfortable size for just William and Lilith to live. The kitchen and living room was one large open room, with a large hearth in the centre and a chimney running up the middle of the house. The windows were small to reduce the draft in the winter, the roof was thatched, and the main structure of the house was made of thick dark wooden beams.
Lilith climbed up the narrow wooden stairs to the next level, crouching under a low beam and stepping into the next room. It was a bare room, and empty like the rest of the house. But it

wouldn't take much to make it feel like home. Lilith stepped across the room, her boots making heavy thuds on the old floor. She opened the door to the next room, gasping and jerking back as a small group of sleeping bats she had disturbed erupted from the little corner they slept and exploded in a panicked mass. They fluttered around the room several times before eventually finding the open window and escaping. Lilith let out a deep sigh, calming her beating heart. She stepped lightly across the room, leaning forwards and closing the window, ensuring the bats don't come back. Of course they might even find another way in.
Lilith returned downstairs, seeing William and the three girls exploring the new environment.
'It's so big!' Tiffany declared loudly.
'That it is' William smiled. 'Lilith' he said spotting her. 'There you are.'
'I was just having a look upstairs' she told him.
'What's it like?'
'It's nice.'
He smiled again. 'Come' he said to all of them. 'Let's go take a look outside.'
Outside the land that came with the home was spacious.
'Good soil' William noted as he let the dirt fall through his fingers. 'It's not huge, but we could make a lot of use out of this land.'
'With cats and dogs?' Lilith asked.
William rolled his eyes at her silently.
'We should be getting back' he said to her.
'You're right' Lilith said. 'We've seen enough.'
'Are you happy with it?' William asked her.
Lilith shot him a sly glance, smirking at him. 'Yes' she answered simply. 'I am.'
'When will you have it?' Lizzie asked quietly from beside her.
'Just as soon as we are married' Lilith told the small girl. 'But for now, we must go home.'
The journey back to the city felt much shorter than the one they had travelled away from it. All five of them chatted excitedly about the possibilities of the future and the house, the whole way back. It was only when it was too late did William and Lilith realise that they had missed their stop.
'We'll have to get off in one of the richer quarters' William was saying, staring out of the window at the city streets. 'We seem to have missed our stop.'
'Nothing to worry about' Lilith sighed sitting back. 'We know our way back. Don't we love?'
He smiled at her.
At the next station, they departed, stepping out into the familiar streets they knew at home.
'It'll be a long walk' William was saying. 'But we're all used to that right?'
'Yay!' Ellie squeaked, jumping up and down.
Beside her, the quiet Lizzie leant into Lilith, taking her by the hand.
William crouched to allow Tiffany to climb on his shoulders. Rising again with her hanging onto his ears, they made their way.
They walked through the thickest parts of the crowd. Lilith moved gracefully, her hands slipping in and out of pockets all around her, and no one noticed a thing.

‘Let me see what I have here’ Lilith said aloud when they had come across a quieter area. ‘Oh look. A lovely silver pocket watch. Some cufflinks. A brooch. And a lovely fan of painted silk.’
‘At it again?’ William asked with amusement. ‘Oh Lilith’ he said shaking his head. ‘Every opportunity. You do amuse me so.’
Along the way, Lilith spotted something in a shop window that made her slow. She stared through the large open window, into the brightly lit room within. Inside, there was a young woman about Lilith’s age and height and build. She was standing on a small stood in the middle of the room, wearing the most beautiful wedding dress Lilith had ever seen. Around her, two older women were fussing over the material she wore, checking that everything fit perfectly and was in its correct place.
‘It’s beautiful. Isn't it?’
Lilith turned to William who had spoken behind her. He had returned to her, after noticing she had become distracted.
‘It is’ Lilith agreed.
William stepped beside her, side by side they looked into the shop at the young woman. She seemed to be pleased with her dress.
‘I say’ William pondered aloud. ‘She looks awfully close to your build. Doesn’t she?’
Lilith glanced at him, a mischievous look in her eyes.
Within the constantly moving mass of people that made up the streets in the day, was a particular man. In a one in a million chance, he happened to be in the same spot, at the same time, and happened to notice, the grey haired girl. The gentleman froze in shock, at first not believing what he was seeing.
‘Ken?’ came a voice beside him.
‘Yes wife?’ he asked the woman holding his arm as they had walked.
‘What ever is the matter?’
‘Nothing’ Ken said hastily. ‘Nothing you need to worry yourself with.’ He smiled at her then, drawing his arm away. ‘Beatrice my love, would you do me a favour and return home. I will be joining you shortly.’
‘What are you going to do?’ she asked him curiously. ‘What’s happened?’
‘Nothing’ he smiled again. ‘Everything is fine. I promise you. I would never lie to you, but it would make me very happy if you went home right now. I will catch you up.’
‘As you say my love’ Beatrice submitted. She kissed him quickly, before turning on her heel and striding away without a backwards glance.
Ken watched her go briefly, before turning with a grim expression, back towards his daughter, and the young man she was with.
He stood for a moment, observing Lilith and contemplating his options. He stayed there, until eventually Lilith and the man she was with, accompanied by three young girls; wandered off down one of the streets.
Your children? Ken thought. *No, one at least is too old.*
He noticed then something to his convenience. A young boy, clearly not from the rich quarters, but from the poor was slinking discretely within the crowd of men and women.
Ken continued to watch him. The boy was short enough to be easily overlooked by almost everyone around him perfect for the boy as it turned out, for he was a pickpocket. Ken saw as

his little hand, quick and lightning and smooth in movement, slipped into several different pockets before he noticed he was being watched. The boy tensed suddenly, glaring at Ken. Clearly like many of the poor people, he despised the rich.
He was about to turn and slip into the crowd, where he would be lost forever, but before he managed to leave, Ken caught his attention.
Before the boy could turn, Ken dipped his hand into a pocket, bringing out a coin he threw it on the ground. The boy leapt for it immediately, drawing back slightly after he had picked it up, eyes fixed with mistrust still upon Ken. Ken went into his pocket again, and tossed another coin to the boy, which again the boy picked up. He seemed to visibly relax. Ken tossed the boy another coin for good measure, and turned and walked away.
The boy followed at a distance.
Ken led the boy out of the crowd and to a quiet street, dropping coins every so often to ensure he followed. When he had gotten the boy to a quiet spot alone, he turned to him.
'You see this?' he said to the nameless boy, holding up a larger gold coin. 'This piece will buy you food for three months. You want it don't you?'
The boy's eyes grew large and hungry. He stared at the coin with the same intensity as a starving dog would to fresh meat.
'There is a woman with grey hair, walking with a man and three young girls' Ken told the boy. 'They walked in *that* direction' he said pointing the correct way. 'Find out where they live, and meet me at this spot, the same time tomorrow.'
'Why do you want to know?' the boy asked with narrowed eyes.
'That does not concern you' Ken replied. 'Do this for me' he said tossing the coin to him, 'and you shall receive another like that.'
The boy snatched up the coin fast, tucking it beneath his old jacket and backing off.
'Hurry' Ken told the boy. 'Or else you will lose them.'
'I won't lose them' the boy said confidently. 'I know these streets like the back of my hand. Even the rich quarters.'
'I'm sure you do.'
'And you will give me more coin if I do this?'
'Like I said' Ken said. 'Here. Same time tomorrow.'
'I will see it done' the boy answered. And he slipped away, like an eel in the reeds in a riverbed. He could not be found again, until he wanted to be found. Like a ghost. The boy would return of his own free will, when the time was right.

That night, Lilith left the home she shared with William and his family. The two slunk into the night, climbing on the rooftops to get a better vantage. Each of them wore a hideous mask to cover their face. Grotesque they were, and deformed. Williams was that of a blubbering fish, Lilith's a large-eyed insect with whiskers.
'Are you ready?' he asked her.
Behind her mask she gleamed. 'Are you?'
He smirked at her, making off into the night. She followed her. They moved swiftly through the silent streets, after only a short time leaping up onto the rooftops to run. Here they got a better view of the area around them, and it was easier to move as they jumped from rooftop to

rooftop over the streets below. William slowed to a stop, staring up at a tall tower before them. A home belonging to a rich family no doubt.
'Lilith' William said thoughtfully. 'How do you feel about a little detour?'
'That sounds like a wonderful idea' Lilith beamed excitedly.
William pulled his backpack free, rummaging through it quickly to see what he could find. Using a rope and grappling hook, they climbed the tower of the rich man's house. Lilith opened the window with ease and climbed in, turning to help William up. Behind them the moon shone a white glowing sphere in the sky, large and beautiful.
William climbed through the window, straightening up and dusting himself off. The two observed the room around them. It was a large and spacious room, typical of so many of the rooms the rich had. The sleeping couple in the four-poster bed did not stir. They were sleeping deeply.
'They look so happy' Lilith said stepping over towards them.
'Come on' William whispered slyly. 'Let's help ourselves.'
They crept about the various rooms and down the corridors, looking around to see what they could find. They wandered about here and there, exploring the place and touching everything and thieving everything of value, taking what they pleased. As they went about their work, a cat sitting on a table, watched them with vacant eyes and a bored expression. The cat continued to watch them as they climbed back through the window, and escaped.
When they were gone, the cat went back to sleep.
When William and Lilith were done robbing the home of the unfortunate person, they made their way to the shop they had stood the day before. Lilith produced a lock pick from her person, and entered the shop with ease. Once they were inside, the two pulled down their masks, breathing heavy sighs.
'I prefer the city at night' William was saying. 'It has a certain quality about it. Don't you think?'
'I do' Lilith smiled at him. 'It's the silence' she told him. 'This place feels different at night.'
They began to explore the interior of the shop.
'Look at all these beautiful materials' William spoke up, feeling the fabrics between his fingers.
'I know' Lilith said. 'They remind me of the old days, before I came to you.'
He turned to her. 'Do you regret it?' he asked.
'No' Lilith answered. 'I regret nothing.' She leapt over the counter with grace and fluid movement. It took her only a moment of fiddling with the till, before it slid open with a click.
'Mine. Mine. Mine' Lilith said as she began to empty it. 'Aaaaaaaand….Mine.'
'Don't get distracted' William told her. 'We're here for the dress remember?'
'Well I don't see it here.'
'It's already been made specially to fit a certain person' William said. 'It's probably out back.'
They found it soon enough. A beautiful pure white dress specially made to fit a slender frame. Its design was created for modesty, with a high collar and the arms, shoulders and chest made of an intricate lace pattered with flowers.
'You're going to look utterly magnificent' William sighed, gazing down upon it.
'I am' Lilith smiled, 'aren't I?'She looked up at him. 'William…' she whispered.

He moved closer to her, lifting a hand to brush her cheek. Lilith lifted her head to his kiss, falling into his embrace.
'William' she whispered between kisses. 'I love you.'
'I know' he said, hand holding the back of her head as he held her to him. He leant back slightly so that he could see her. 'My angel.'
Lilith bit her lip, glancing away.
'We should go' she said.
'Alright' he said turning his back to her. 'Though there is no rush.'
He stood still for a moment, allowing Lilith to unzip the bag on his back and place their stolen valuables inside.
'You don't feel bad about all of this do you?' William asked her as she zipped the bag back up.
'Bad?'
He turned to face her again.
'Stealing from the rich I mean' he explained.
'Oh.' Lilith sighed, slumping her shoulders with a smile. 'Where on earth did that come from?' she shook her head. 'Of course I don't feel bad. The arrogant deserve to be stolen from.'
'Good' William bobbed his head happily. 'I was just making sure.'
They left the dress shop at a relaxed pace, as if they were simply browsing and not stealing from it in the middle of the night. Lilith closed the door behind her, leaving the place almost exactly as they had left it. The door she locked after her; and the owner of the shop would not know anything was out of place until the counter was checked, and that customer who ordered the dress came calling. They would never be found.
'That was almost too easy' Lilith sighed as they strolled down the street. 'No' she said correcting herself. 'It was too easy.'
'Maybe we're just really good at what we do.'
'Perhaps' Lilith smiled, 'but it does you no good to become too vain.'
'Is a little vanity acceptable?' William asked teasingly.
'Well' Lilith said grinning slyly. 'Perhaps.'
Simultaneously the two slowed to a stop. At exactly the same time, the two had noticed a small group in the street before them. The darkness has concealed each from the other, and by the time Lilith and William had noticed the group, the group had noticed them.
'Oh' William groaned, when the surprise wore off. 'Street thugs.'
'What did you say?' one of them spoke all too loudly in the silent night.
William should have perhaps kept his mouth shut, but in truth they would have been in trouble anyway, so he did not care to watch his tongue.
'I'm sorry gentlemen' William said to them, not feeling sorry at all. 'I just let that slip. Forgive my foolish tongue.'
'Maybe you should watch yourself better' another said in a confrontational tone.
'How would you like to taste the pavement?' another said.
'Hey what's in the bag?' said another. There were about four of them. Hard to tell exactly in the near pitch dark.
Oh no Lilith thought. *The dress*.

She looked at William desperately. He glanced at her, and seemed to understand her fears.
'Perhaps we can' come to some agreement that would suit all of us' William offered as the thugs approached. William looked at each of their heads, for he could not see clearly their faces. There were indeed four of them.
'What agreement would that be?' asked one of them. 'And what are you two doing out so late? And is that a woman?' the thug asked suddenly taking a closer look at Lilith's profile.
'A lady should not be out in the streets at night' he told her. 'It's dangerous.'
'I am no lady' Lilith answered with a scowl. She was glad it was so dark. She could only imagine the hungry look he gave her now. *Men think of only one thing* she sighed inwardly.
'The lady' one of the thugs said. 'For safe passage.'
William and Lilith glanced to each other, then back at the thugs. William spoke.
'Go to hell.'
One of then punched him hard in the face. William fell back. Lilith lunged forward to try to help him, but she was grabbed from behind by one of the men, who now held her around the neck. Her first instinct was to throw her head back, butting him hard in the nose. He stumbled away, hollering obscenities at her. Another stepped forwards and backhanded her hard. She fell to her knees.
They now turned their attention onto William. Lilith slowly looked up to see them surrounding him. He was backed against the wall now, watching the four men advancing on him.
She turned towards the dropped backpack.
'It's time you learnt a valuable lesson boy' one of the thugs said, grabbing William either side of his face.
One of his friends cried out in pain suddenly. There others jerked their heads around at the noise. Lilith had plunged a knife downwards into the shoulder of one of the man.
'You little bitch' the man snarled, nursing his injury.
Lilith backed away, never breaking the eye contact with the man she had stabbed.
'You will pay for hurting my brother' one of the men said stepping towards her.
Behind them, William acted without hesitation. He crouched low, whipping a tiny knife out of his pocket and slicing the back of the legs of two of the men. They instantly collapsed. At the same time he did this, Lilith threw a smoke bomb, throwing the scene into confusion. By the time the smoke cleared, William and Lilith were gone.
'Are you alright?' William fussed when they were safely away. They had climbed the rooftops in their escape, and had found each other shortly after.
'I was more worried about you' Lilith confessed.
'I will be fine. It's nothing I haven't experienced before he said wiping the blood from his lips. 'I'm glad you're alright.'
'It would take more than that to hurt me' Lilith smiled. 'We should go home. I think we've been out for too long.'
When they returned home they found that one of the children were still awake, as was expected. The house was never still, not even at night.
'Where were you?' the boy asked. 'I woke and couldn't find you.'
'You shouldn't have been looking for us anyway' William scolded. 'Why are you not in bed?'

‘I couldn’t sleep’ Tommy answered. ‘And I was hungry. Have you been stealing?’
‘What we’ve been doing doesn’t concern you’ William replied vaguely.
‘But isn’t stealing wrong?’ Tommy asked speaking to Lilith.
‘Well’ Lilith said grinning slyly. ‘Not from the rich.’
The next morning, Lilith and William woke early, after having only a few hours sleep. The others within the house could not wait to see their spoils of the night before, and as Lilith laid out the dress for the others to see, they all stared down in awe at it.
‘You're going to look beautiful’ a young woman named Bea said.
‘So when are you going to be married?’ Tommy asked her.
Lilith shared a glance with William.
‘We’ve enough money now’ William said.
‘Tomorrow then?’ Lilith said.
‘Tomorrow’ William smiled.

‘Same time tomorrow’ the boy said standing in the alley they had agreed to meet again. ‘I'm here now. Where’s my reward?’
Ken regarded the boy coldly, staring down at him.
‘First you must tell me where they live.’
‘I will.’
The boy explained briefly. Ken wasn’t particular familiar with the poor quarters, but the boy pointed out some landmarks.
‘Hmm’ Ken groaned uncertainly. ‘Is there anything else you can tell me? Where will the young gentleman be? The one the grey haired girl was with?’
‘They're planning to get married today’ the boy said. ‘A bit later on, in only a few hours time. The gentleman is making the most of his life as a free man.’ The boy took a step back. ‘He will be at the dog fights.’
‘Good’ Ken nodded. ‘Perfect. I don’t know the area all that well but I know more or less where that place is.’
‘Good’ the boy repeated. ‘Now where is the coin you promised me?’
‘I trust you speak the truth’ Ken said not moving.
‘What do you take me for?’ the boy demanded interjected. ‘I may be a thief but I'm no liar!’
‘Fine’ Ken sighed handing him the coin.
‘You won’t see me again’ the boy said snatching the coin from him as quickly as he could.
He turned and ran away.
Ken stood where he was for a moment in thought.
‘Lilith’ he spoke aloud. ‘You haven’t told him have you?’ he took a deep sigh. ‘He would never marry you if he knew.’
Ken made his way through the city. He took a carriage to the edge of the poor quarters, and walked the rest of the way. He wore a dark cloak on this day, to hide the rich colours he wore, for he owned nothing plainer. Even so he stood out in his dark cloak, but much less so had he not brought it along.
He found the mystery man indeed where the boy had told. In one of the many dingy, dark streets of the poor quarters, a street as unremarkable as all the others, Ken found the man.

William was standing in a ring with many other cheering men, leaning over a crude wall made of a cheap board built in a circle and hollering, calling bets to one another and cheering. Ken stood at the edge of the low board wall where there was a small gap, just large enough for him to stand comfortably. Looking over the wall he looked on in distain at the spectacle before him. Dog fighting. Two small and muscular dogs with wide heads and short legs tore at each other with a ferocity that was possessed by few other creatures in the world.
Ken shook his head in disgust at the scene. After a short time, one of the dogs were dead. Ken looked up at William standing on the other side of the ring. The small crowd began to disperse, Ken watched as many of them exchanged coins, those losing bets gave coin, those winning bets took happily and filled their purses. Ken approached the man that took his interest, ignoring the peculiar looks he was receiving from all directions.
'What is your name?' Ken spoke to the man.
The man glanced up at him, giving Ken the same strange look the others had given him.
'A rich man in the poor quarters?' William said. 'What possible business do you have here? And why speak to me?'
'What is your name?' Ken asked.
'It's William.'
'I need to speak to you about something important. In private.'
'Whatever you wish you tell me' William said, 'you can do so here.'
Ken sighed wearily. 'It's about Lilith' he said. 'Believe me. You want to hear this.'

Lilith looked utterly beautiful in the dress she and William had stolen together; it required only a brief adjustment to fit her size.
'You look amazing!' one of the children said.
Lilith smiled down at him, glancing back at the tall mirror before her. The dress, now *her* dress, was pure white and fit her slender frame perfectly. Its design was created for modesty, with a high collar and the arms, shoulders and chest made of an intricate lace pattered with flowers. Lilith stared at her reflection; she looked taller in the dress. Her grey hair was tied back behind her, and she wore not jewellery, only awaited the ring William would soon give her. Her husband, or soon to be.
'I've never been happier' Lilith whispered to herself. 'I wish this day to last forever.'

The gathering was set place in the green field on the edge of the city, where the grass grew green and the open space was fresher and more beautiful outside the city than it was in.
There was a holy man standing below an archway of white flowers. Nearly a hundred people, friends and family and friends of friends were gathered at the wedding that was due to begin, even complete strangers turned up. But all were welcome at such public events in the poor quarters, be they stranger or not. Lilith stood near the holy man, at the bottom of a short flight of wooden steps that had been brought out especially for the occasion; they were painted white to match the dress she wore, and the flowers above them.
'Where is he?' Lilith asked tentatively, her voice a trace of concern.
'This is his last day as a free man' the holy man explained. 'He is making the most of it I'm sure.'

Lilith listened to his words, looking away from him into the distance, her eyes glazed over.
He was an hour or so late, when he arrived, and when he did, he was not dressed in the fine suit he had tried on that morning. Instead he was dressed in his casual clothes. Lilith's stomach sank at the sight, and the people, the guests around them broke out into murmurs which rippled like a wave.
As Lilith gazed down at William who stood at a distance, she knew something was very very wrong.
'The wedding is off' William spoke loudly in a dead voice. He said quietly now, 'I will not marry Lilith.'
The gasps erupted and the murmurs continued louder. The guests glanced from side to side at each other uncertainly.
'Lilith' William said in a sombre tone. 'We need to speak alone.'
They walked a distance away from the people. Even if they shouted here, they would not have been heard. The walk to this spot had been agonising for Lilith.
'If I have done anything to offend you' Lilith said when they were alone, 'I am very sorry.'
'You didn't tell me' William said in a harsh voice, one he had never used speaking to her before. 'Lilith. Why? Why didn't you tell me?'
Lilith stared at him wide-eyed.
She sighed deeply, letting her shoulders sag. The white flowers she held, she dropped to the floor now. The bundle tumbled and separated, falling a distance from each other. Forgotten.
'I'm sorry' Lilith whispered, not trusting her voice now that it shook. 'I should have told you.'
'Your father came to find me' William said. 'It's a good thing that he did.'
Lilith lowered her eyes.
'What if we had had children?' William spat furiously.
'It doesn't mean they will be the same' Lilith answered, looking at him now. 'My father isn't. My mother isn't.'
'But your grandmother is' William spoke, his lip curling in disgust. 'Sometimes it skips a generation.'
Lilith stared at him. Her heart racing. She couldn't believe what was happening.
'Your father's mother was one' William went on. 'Your mother felt cursed when she bore you. She stayed away from you. She waited for the day you were old enough to leave your home so she could be with your father again. You've never met her. You don't even know what she looks like. You know nothing about her. Only that she hates you.'
William balled his fists.
'I cannot believe you would deceive me like this. You've betrayed me.'
'But I…' Lilith moaned, tears spilling now, unable to hold them back any longer. 'I just wanted a normal life….'
'Maybe it would have been better if you were never born.'
'How can you say that?' Lilith whispered. 'You're acting just like everyone else in my past that treated me with scorn.'
'I should have known' William shook his head backing off. 'I should have known there was something wrong with you. Why would a *normal* person choose to leave that life behind for this one?'

Lilith watched in silence as he moved away.
‘You're a freak’ he said to her. ‘There is no place for you in this world.’

PART 3

Chapter Seven
A Thing Forgotten

Lilith walked away from the city, heading in no particular direction. She could not go back there, not now, not ever. Maybe William was right, and there was truly no place for her in this world.
Her own parents didn’t want her. The man she was about to marry, the man she had thought and dreamed to spend the rest of her life with, had rejected her. Like so many others had done before.
‘I can never go back there’ Lilith mumbled to herself. ‘I can never go back.’
She walked across the plains for hours and hours without rest, and through woodlands, long after night had fallen. And then, due to exhaustion and excursion and lack of food and water, she collapsed.

Lilith woke some unknown time later. It took her some few second to orientate herself. It was still dark, and she was experiencing the motion of being rocked back and forth. She then realised she was on a horse travelling at a high speed. There was someone behind her holding the reigns.
She threw herself to the side suddenly and without warning. She hit the ground hard, rolling over and scrambling to her feet, trying to right herself. She saw before her not one, but two figures mounted each on a horse of their own. They jerked the reigns, pulling the horses around to face her.
Lilith stared in confusion and uncertainty at the figures mounted upon the horses. They both wore a black cloak which covered all of their body; even on their hands they wore black gloves so that none of their skin could be seen. And on their faces, they wore the strangest masks, pure black like the rest of them. Long beaks that grew outwards and two large round eyes which reflected the world they saw.
‘What is this?’ Lilith demanded. ‘Who are you?’
‘You don’t need to know who we are’ one of the masked figures said in a foreign voice. Lilith could not distinguish the two, but the one that spoke now did so with a male voice.
‘And besides’ the other masked figure said in a female voice, also foreign, ‘you wouldn’t understand even if we told you.’
‘Where were you taking me?’

‘Now that I suppose we can answer’ the male figure said. ‘There is a village not far from here. ‘In fact we’re nearly there. ‘If you would like to hop back on this horse, I’d take you the rest of the way.’
‘I'm not getting on the horse’ Lilith said firmly.
The two figures turned to face each other. It was as if they were sharing a secret language.
‘I told you she would act this way’ the female said. ‘She’s a strong one. A fighter.’
‘Stubborn is what I call it’ the male sighed.
‘It’s not stubborn to want to do things for yourself’ the female argued. ‘How do you learn if you always lean on others?’
‘Don’t start lecturing me’ the male shot back. ‘My god woman. You’ve always got to nag.’
‘Don’t you give me that shit’ the female growled.
‘Be silent’ Lilith ordered them both.
‘See’ the female said, clearly smiling behind the mask. ‘A defiant one. I like her. She’s a strong one. A fighter.’
‘Shut up!’ Lilith called to them, balling her fists and stepping forwards. ‘Now tell me who you both are.’
‘No way’ the male said teasingly. ‘That would spoil the fun.’
‘Then why were you taking me to the village?’ Lilith asked impatiently.
‘To help you’ the male answered.
‘Why do you wish to help me?’
‘Jesus Christ’ the male sighed. ‘So many questions.’
‘Who on earth are you?’ Lilith spoke.
‘Oh no’ the male shook his head. ‘Not on this earth. We’re not from around here.’
‘Stop joking around’ the female snapped. ‘And keep your mouth shut, you’ll spoil everything. Remember we’re only supposed to watch.’
‘We’re not *supposed* to do anything. We can do what we like. Remember who we are?’ the male said.
‘If we interfere too much…’
‘Ya ya’ the male waved dismissively. ‘Whatever. Listen’ he spoke to Lilith now. ‘We’ve got to scram before we interfere too much. If we haven’t already. We were only taking you to the village.’ He reached into his cloak. ‘Here’s some money’ he said tossing a small pouch at Lilith’s feet. ‘Have fun. Buy a drink. Buy a new dress. Buy a goat for all I care. But it’s best to put us out of your minds. Ta ta my little angel.’ He sighed deeply then. ‘If only we had a vacancy in our group, I would so choose to recruit you. You’d be just what we would look for. A pretty little angel like you…such a beautiful thing. We wouldn’t treat you like an outcast. Not where we live. You’d fit in real nice.’ He waved to her. ‘Goodbye now angel. Have fun walking the rest of the way, and remember I did offer you a lift which you refused. Think about that now while you walk the rest of the way.’ The male turned his horse around and rode off.
The female hung back. ‘You probably won’t see us again’ she said to Lilith. ‘You should forget about us. We’re not supposed to be here.’
The female rode after him, disappearing into the woods.
A few seconds later, Lilith realised that they had told her she was near a village, but not in which direction the village was. She sighed deeply, shoulders slumped. Lilith reached down

and picked up the pouch, counting the coins briefly in a bored manner. There was about enough to live on for a week or two. She tucked it in her wedding dress, which was by now filthy from the fall and the sweat from the long walk, and made her way onwards in a random direction.
She soon forgot the two strange figures.

Chapter Eight
Day by Day

It took her far longer than it should have done to reach the village. At least, she was reasonably certain it was the one she was originally being taken to by the strangers. She wandered for ages, backtracking and zigzagging until she eventually found it. It was small, and little more than an inn for travellers and a few houses built on farmland.
Lilith had been walking all day, and by the time she eventually reached her destination, she felt close to collapsing from exhaustion. She spoke to a passerby, a young woman going about her business.
'How much do you want for that dress?'
'Excuse me?' the woman replied, taken aback and more than a little surprised.
'I want your dress' Lilith repeated. 'How much do you want for it?'
'Why?'
'Look at me' Lilith said.
The stranger looked her up and down. 'You much have really been through something.'
'Here' Lilith said, ignoring the woman's comment and pulling out the pouch she carried tucked in her sleeve. 'This should be more than enough.'
Lilith gave the woman roughly half of what was in the pouch without bothering to count it. The woman accepted the money, staring down at it for a brief moment, counting it in her head. She smiled approvingly, bending down to hide the coins in her sock.
'I don't know what's happened to you' she was saying, 'but I'm not stupid enough to pass an opportunity like this.' She lifted the skirt of her dress, pulling over her head and handing to Lilith, wearing only her white under dress now. 'Here' she said promptly. 'And good day to you.' She walked away.
Lilith glanced over the dress she held in a hand. It was nondescript. Brown. Worn. She carried it with her to the inn and booked a room and ordered a hot meal, using the last of the money she had. That night she bathed, and changed out of her filthy wedding dress, keeping only the shoes she originally had. She slept deeply, waking early the next morning and putting on the brown nondescript dress she had bought from the woman. She left the inn before most of the other guests had even woken, and by the time one of the innkeepers went to her room to tidy, she was long gone.
'What on earth is this?' the innkeeper said lifting the torn and filthy wedding dress before him. 'This is the dress that strange grey-haired woman came in with yesterday. I say. She must have a strange and tragic story indeed.'

Lilith came to stay in the next town she came across, and it was here she decided to call home. There was nowhere better she could be. With no family that wanted her, and almost everyone she met who would shun her if they knew what she was, there was no good place for her to stay, and so she made her own home where she could.
She became a vagrant and a beggar, living on the streets like many others in this town whom life had not been so kind to. But she made the best with what little she had. What she had learnt living in the poor quarters in the city she once called home, had opened opportunities to her that would otherwise not have existed. So now, she was a thief, not just a beggar, and she stole from others to survive. She took no pleasure in it, not like she did when she was living with William, when she stole from only rich people. Now she stole from people who only just about kept their heads above the water, and for that she felt endless guilt.
Well she thought yet again as she slipped her hand into another pocket. *I would rather see them lose out than me*. But every time she thought the same thought, she thought without conviction.
Her skills in thievery made her successful in living on the streets, and she was soon, by far, the best off out of all those who slept outside in the cold. She had made a den for herself under a bridge. A little home built out of board and planks nailed together. She could manage to steal just about anything, and it was more than easy to steal a hammer and nails and many blankets and pillows. After a time, she didn't feel any cold at all in the nights. It was in fact, she decided, quite cosy in her little box by the river. Many others would be jealous of what she had, and they were, as Lilith found out soon enough when once, she was attacked.

They came in the middle of the night without warning. Lilith was trapped. They broke apart the door with ease and attacked her. They cut up her face. But none would open their doors to help a vagrant. As far as other people were concerned, whatever trouble they suffered they brought upon themselves.
Lilith didn't know how she managed to escape with her life. But she did so somehow, swimming downriver in the cold water and climbing out onto the shore some distance away, sobbing hysterically and clutching at her face. The blood ran between her fingers.
The next day, she would steal a knife of her own, several in fact, and she made a new home. Somewhere high up and harder to find. On the roof of the highest building in the town. None one would find her here. It was so difficult to get to, climbing up and down the side of the building, especially when carrying wood. But she managed it, and here, she made another home, to replace to last.
She continued on with life, having learnt another valuable lesson. Starting again, and getting used to her new face. The scars made it look like she had spent a long time living as she did, it made it look like she knew what she was doing. And she did. As least she thought so. The other beggars made an effort now to get out of the way, and those that were not homeless avoided her like the plague, which made it harder to steal. But it didn't stop her. Lilith stole a hooded cloak, which she came to wear all the time now. A pretty dark purple thing, that made her look like a traveller, and not just a thief and begging vagrant. It was a nice piece, but more than anything, it hid her face.

Chapter Nine
Lily and the Cake

Lilith lived on the street for what must have been months. Things were going as well as they could have been. She had been left alone for the most part, and her home on the roof had not been discovered. She spent her days now sitting in the streets, wandering about, stealing or otherwise just sleeping, and wishing time would move faster. It was a boring life, but at least she was alive.

One day, sitting in the streets, like she did on many days, she saw something of interest, and of some concern. There was a young girl sitting in the streets opposite from her. She was but a child, looking to be only about eleven in age. Lilith lifted her head towards the girl. She looked frightened, and out of place. It was clear she was lost.
Lilith stood, and made her way slowly across the street to stand before her.
'It's ok child' she said. 'I'm not going to hurt you.'
The girl looked timidly up at her.
'You look lost.'
'I am' the girl replied meekly. 'Of a sort'.
'Why are you out here alone?' Lilith asked her.
'I ran away. My home is not safe for me anymore.'
'It's safer than being out here on your own.'
'You don't know that' the girl said stubbornly.
'But I do' Lilith replied. She lowered her hood, and the girl shrank back at the sight of her scars. 'They're horrible aren't they?' Lilith said sadly. 'I was unarmed, defenceless and alone, and I was attacked in the middle of the night while I slept. They might have tried to kill me, but I managed to run away.'
'How did you escape?' the girl asked uncertainly.
'I don't know myself.' Lilith sighed. 'But you know what?'
'What?'
Lilith leant forwards, speaking quietly now. 'I didn't give up.'
The girl stared wide eyed back at her.
'What is your name?'
'Lily.'
'A sweet name' Lilith smiled. 'Mine is Lilith.'
'That's a nice name' Lily smiled. 'I've never heard of someone with that name before.'
'It's a foreign name' Lilith explained. 'I have travelled a lot in my past.'
'Have you?' Lily's eyes lit up. 'Were you rich then?'
Lilith's eyes glazed over. 'I was……once. My family were rich I mean.'
'Then why are you here?'
'I ran away from home' Lilith smiled. 'Like you. And I've never looked back.'
'Do you regret it? Leaving home I mean?'
'No' Lilith said. 'I don't think I do.' She straightened up. 'I take it you're not going back to your own home?'

‘Never!’ Lily said too loudly. ‘I can’t. It’s too dangerous.’
‘I won’t ask what is not by business’ Lilith spoke in a level tone. ‘But if you are sure that you want to stay here in the streets, then I will look after you. This life is different from the one you’ve left, and it is far easier and quicker to learn if someone is to teach you.’
‘Do you mean it?’ Lily said eagerly. ‘Will you look after me?’
‘Yes’ Lilith smiled genuinely now, feeling suddenly elated at the thought of having some company. Someone to care for and share her home with, someone to speak with, laugh with; someone to teach. A little sister.
‘Come with me’ Lilith said taking Lily’s hand. ‘I’ll show you where I sleep at night. It’s not much, but it’s all I have.’ She smiled. ‘I hope you're good at climbing.’

Lilith and Lily lived together for months after that. The young girl Lily, to Lilith’s surprise, adapted very well to her new life on the streets.
Lilith taught her how to steal, and who from. She taught her where to get food, how often it was safe to steal, and most importantly, who to avoid. And to Lilith’s surprise, Lily settled in very well to her new home and daily routine, she even seemed to enjoy it.
One evening, when Lilith and Lily were sitting quietly just outside their rooftop home, watching the fireworks at the start of the New Year, Lilith gasped in wonder at a sudden realisation.
‘My god’ she said. ‘I've been living out here for nearly a year now.’
‘Haven’t the last few months simply flown by?’ Lily smiled, snuggling into her.
‘Well’ Lilith beamed whispering into her ear, holding Lily from behind as they sat down together. ‘The last few certainly have.’
With arms wrapped around Lily in a gentle hold, the two watched the fireworks late into the night, until the last colourful explosion faded away into the silent blackness. A short time later, when they began to grow cold, the two of them receded into their little wooden home.
‘I love it in here’ Lily was saying as she lay down in the box-like structure. ‘It’s so cosy.’
‘I'm so glad you like it’ Lilith said lying down in her own bed beside her.
It was cramped in their tiny home, barely large enough for them to crawl in. But with the many blankets they stole, it was always warm at night.
‘We should celebrate’ Lilith spoke in a whisper to Lily who lay beside her. ‘Tomorrow, we should steal something big, as a present to ourselves.’
‘Really?’ Lily said happily. ‘Like what?’
‘Shh’ Lilith whispered back, placing her fingertips over the girl’s mouth to hush her.
She withdrew her hand.
‘I was thinking’ Lilith went on. ‘That cake shop, you know the really fancy one? They will be making many cakes tomorrow. Maybe we should visit the shop late at night, after it’s closed. We could help ourselves to anything we want.’
‘Really?’ Lily gleamed. She squealed happily, clapping her hands. ‘I'm so excited!’
‘Me too’ Lilith whispered.
It was a tradition for many, the day after the New Years fireworks to buy an expensive cake as a token of celebration. The cakes that were produced were expensive and of beautiful designs and delicious tastes. They were in themselves masterpieces, and pieces of art.

‘My mother and brother always used to take me out to the cake shop’ Lily explained. ‘We used to pick a cake together. Every year.’
‘I've been wondering’ Lilith said, her tone becoming serious. ‘Why did you run away from home? You seem to miss it a lot.’
‘My father tried to kill me’ Lily mumbled sadly. ‘I'm not safe there anymore.’
‘Why would he do that?’
Lily didn’t answer. She simply fell silent and looked sad, like she always did on those rare occasions when Lilith tried to ask about her past.
‘Never mind’ Lilith whispered, leaning forward to kiss her on the cheek. ‘Tomorrow night we will pick out a cake together. We’ve both got something to look forward to.’
‘I can’t wait’ Lily said perking up again. ‘I'm going to be thinking about it all night.’
‘Me too’ Lilith smiled. ‘We can sleep in as late as we want, then we can wander the streets and see which shops we would like to visit later.’
Lilith kissed her again, lying back down on her bed. ‘Now sleep. Tomorrow we will celebrate with cake.’
But it was not meant to be.
The next day when the two wandered the streets, they ran into a person.
‘Lily?!’ the man cried out in shock and disbelief. ‘Thank the gods you're alright!’
‘Raymond!’ Lily replied, seemingly equally in shock to see him as he picked her up and hugged her tight.
‘Who is this?’ Lilith asked uncertainly at this sudden and unexpected event.
‘It’s my brother’ Lily told her.
‘I'm so glad…thank the gods…’ Raymond wept. ‘Thank the gods…’
‘Raymond…’ Lily said. ‘What…?’
‘Your mother and I have been praying day and night that we might find you safe and well. We’ve been searching for you everywhere. We never stopped looking. How did you get this far?’
‘I…’
‘You must come home’ Raymond hastened. ‘Mother has grown sick with worry, she’s become quite ill. When she sees you, she will be better in an instant, I'm sure of it.’ He looked her deep in the eyes. ‘How have you survive for this long? You look…well.’
‘Lilith’ Lily spoke, ‘she…’ Lily turned, but she was gone. ‘No…’ she whispered. ‘We were going to steal cakes together.’
Raymond blinked uncertainly. ‘What?’

She headed back to the place she called home. Along the way, Lilith noticed something odd that she had not noticed before. She caught her reflection in a shop window, and faltered, slowing to a stop. Lilith stepped towards the glass, touching her own face. Her scars were hideous, and pronounced, but it was not that which caught her attention, but her hair. It was no longer growing grey like it had done for the last few years when she had lived in the city, but white, like it had when she was very young. From her scalp grew hair that was pure white like freshly fallen snow, the filthy grey she had become so used to, was fading away, and growing out.

Chapter Ten
A New Life

After Lily was gone, Lilith decided in her heart that it was time to move on. She couldn't stay here anymore, and remember the time she had spent with Lily. She couldn't bring herself to wish things had stayed the same. Lily was with her own family now, and far safer than if she had stayed with her. But even so, she was dearly missed.
The day after Lily was gone, Lilith left the town, leaving everything she owned behind save for a few small items. The clothes she wore and what little she could fit in her pockets that was of value. She wandered the roads, only travelling at night for safety, when it would be harder for people to spot her, and easier for her to hide. Lilith stopped at the next town that was suitable, where she spent her days now begging in the streets.

'How is your fish?'
'It is most satisfying' Ken smiled back at his wife.
Beatrice gleamed at him. 'Here' she said, stabbing a strawberry on her plate and moving it towards him to eat.
'Beatrice' Ken said sternly, unable to keep the amusement from his voice. 'I haven't finished my meal yet. I'll have dessert *after* I finish. I still can't believe you are as slim and beautiful as you are when you eat so fast.'
Beatrice smiled silently back at him, poking the strawberry against his lips repeatedly until he submitted and opened his mouth to eat it.
'Delicious' he said. 'As usual.'
'They do serve the best food here don't they my love?'
'They do indeed.'
'You know we haven't been to the theatre for a long time' Beatrice spoke aloud. 'Wouldn't it be wonderful for us to go?'
'I do enjoy the theatre' Ken replied with gentle eyes. He picked up his glass and sipped his wine. 'What day did you have in mind?'
'Tomorrow.'
'So soon? But we're attending a gathering tomorrow. Many of your friends and many of my friends will be expecting our presence.'
'I suppose' Beatrice replied thoughtfully. She fell silent as a servant hurried past their table. 'Why don't we go….*after* the party?'
'But it would be so late' Ken answered. 'So dark.'
'So *romantic*' Beatrice corrected. 'After we've seen the show, we should take a midnight stroll around the lake. There are swans there at the moment I hear, and it will be a full moon tomorrow night. It would be a perfect night for us.'
'We will be so busy tomorrow.'

Beatrice reached her yellow gloved hand forward, grasping his hand on the table. ‘There is much for us to do’ she sighed. ‘So little time.’ She brushed her blonde hair back quickly before letting go of his hand and waving for the waiter. ‘My husband had finished his meal’ she told the weary young man. ‘Bring the dessert if you will.’

A few months later, Lilith’s hair had grown out completely white, save for a narrow border which remained at the very tips. She paid to have it cut; with money she had earned begging. People were more sympathetic in this town she had found; life was not so hard for everyone here, just a few. The barber cut her hair quickly and sent her on her way, glad to see her gone. That evening in the rain, Lilith sat in a relatively sheltered spot on the street, watching people go by. Almost everyone ignored her, some gave her coin, but even those that did avoided her eyes. Lilith was sure she knew what they were thinking and feeling. They gave her coin and still thought *freak*.

But on this night when she sat with her hood lowered, a figure approached her. A woman.

‘What nice hair you have.’

Lilith lifted her head. The woman she saw was beautiful, but mature in age. With her tight corset, bare shoulders and dress hiked up so that her tights and tall high-heeled boots could be seen, one only needed a glance to know what she was.

‘Oh dear’ the prostitute said at the sight of Lilith’s scars. ‘You have seen better days haven’t you?’

‘I suppose I have’ Lilith replied.

‘Nevertheless’ she went on. ‘You are very beautiful, even with those scars.’

The two stared at each other silently for a moment.

‘Can I help you at all?’ Lilith asked her uncertainly looking up at her.

‘As a matter of fact you can’ the prostitute beamed, as if she had been waiting for the invitation. ‘My name is Charlotte. I live around here.’

‘My name is Lilith’ Lilith said. ‘I live around here also.’

‘And *that*, is the point I was getting to’ Charlotte smiled. ‘May I sit beside you?’

Charlotte sat without waiting for a reply. ‘I must say it isn’t very comfortable here is it. And it’s a bit wet.’

Lilith glanced to the side towards Charlotte wordlessly.

‘How would you like a place to live with a roof and a soft bed?’

‘In exchange for what?’ Lilith asked slowly, though she knew the answer.

‘We like women who are different. They are…interesting…desired.’ She winked at Lilith cheekily. ‘I could offer you a better life, in exchange for certain…services….’

‘I….’ Lilith began.

‘You don’t have to say anything’ Charlotte spoke over her happily. ‘You will be properly trained so on and so forth. Just say yes and you can begin a new and better life, sleeping in safety every night and all that. Food and a soft bed so on and so forth.’ She leant into her. ‘Our establishment has a lot of money; we could even find someone to look at your scars.’ She smiled. ‘So? Yes or no?’

‘Yes’ Lilith replied without much pause. ‘I suppose so.’

Charlotte squeezed her arm excitedly. ‘You won’t regret it. Trust me; this will be better for both of us.’
‘Both of us?’
‘Of course. I own the establishment. The most girls I have, the more money I make. Now come’ Charlotte said rising. ‘Let me help you up.’
Lilith allowed Charlotte to pull her to her feet.
‘Walk with me’ Charlotte said. ‘And leave behind anything you once owned. You won’t need it anymore.’

Many months passed, and Lilith’s life was now much different than the one she had before. And she had come to find, much to her surprise, that she was actually happy.
She had accepted this new life, and fit into it far better than she could ever have imagined. Her work, was not only business and a way to keep a roof over her head and to eat, it was a way of life, and a life, which she shared with many women, just like her.
Everyone who lived in the house was each different in some way. Outcasts, those with strange habits or special talents. Foreign women, which were especially interesting to those who didn’t travel, as they had unusual accents and wonderful tales of *other* lands. Those who chose to decorate themselves with unusual appearances and styles, and those who naturally looked different. Like Lilith. And truly, for only the second time in her life since William, she felt like she belonged. She felt like she truly fit into this new life, was wanted, and welcomed.

Lilith returned to the house, two women dressed all in black with their hair covered followed after her, carrying the bags with all the things she had bought that day. Lilith had in this new life, more money of her own than she had ever had before. The house was a wonderful place, and she had gained many new sisters when she first moved in, some she preferred more than others, but all were good. In the house, that belonged to Charlotte, the one who owned the business, each woman had their own room where they conducted their business and slept on their own each night, or with a client. They were allowed to do what they like to the room, as long as it was positive and individual. Everything had to be approved by Charlotte, but all the women loved her, she was a kind caring person. She spent more time running the business than taking her own clients these days. She still worked nights sometimes, but inevitably, was aging. Most men chose the younger women, but at times she would still be requested, and she rarely turned them down.
The house was a public building in which everyone was allowed anywhere. And though each had their own rooms, all the women ate together in a communal dining room, prepared together in a large dressing room in the centre of the house, and relaxed together in a room that contained a warm hearth, many luxurious sofas and shelves full of books. In the cupboards in this room were many games like chess and card games that were stored away, and some especially childish games that were designed to always end sexually.
The women of the house were never bored, their work brought in good money, and even though half went to Charlotte for upkeep and her own pocket, the women were all well off. Many spent money on their own luxuries, like visiting the spar, the theatre, expensive parties of expensive gifts. And they were all waited on in the house, by only younger female

servants, made to dress all in black, so as not to draw attention away from the women who were the centre of the business.
Lilith entered the large dressing room, nodding to the two servants who followed her carrying the bags.
'Just put those on the floor' she said to them. 'I will sort them out later when my client has gone.'
They obeyed silently and went away.
'Shopping again Lilith?' one of her sisters sighed, sitting on a chair and leaning towards a mirror, tending to her makeup. 'What have you bought this time?'
'Many wonderful things' Lilith smiled with a playful curtsey. 'Dresses and dresses and gold and mirrors and combs.'
'At this rate you will need a new room to put it all' Sonya replied without looking back. 'And I don't think Charlotte will allow that.'
'I wouldn't expect her to' Lilith replied.
Each sister had her own cupboard in the large dressing room, Lilith went to her own, and quickly tried on a new dress she had bought the day before, a dress she intended to work in.
'What do you think?' she asked Sonya. 'Do you think he will like it?'
Sonya put down her brush, and turned to Lilith.
Sonya was a dark-skinned exotic beauty with almond eyes. She was much sought after, and by far the most requested. She spent more time turning clients away than tending to them these days, and still made more money than her sisters.
'It's beautiful' she said silkily. 'I'm jealous.'
'No you're not' Lilith scoffed.
'It is nice though' another sister spoke up, a scantily clad sister who dressed so to always show off the strange tattoos that covered her body. Bethany was her name. 'Where did you get it?'
'I'll show you tomorrow' Lilith said. 'I had this custom made.'
'Is that what you're wearing tonight?' a pale skinned sister asked. She had straight bright blonde hair that reached her jaw line, and always painted her eyes yellow. Her name was Bebe.
'Do you think he will like it?' Lilith asked, surveying herself in the mirror, tilting her head back and forth.
She wore a stunning, low-cut dress made of a shiny light blue and silver material. It clung to her body showing off her curves, and leaving her shoulders bare. She wore long gloves in a matching material, but no jewellery.
'Did you try it on in the shop?' Sonya asked.
'Of course I did' Lilith replied.
'Is that your favourite colour now?' Bebe asked. 'Blue?'
Lilith stared at her reflection; a slow smile crept across her face.
'It's wonderful having so many sisters' Lilith said gleefully. 'I haven't had a sister since…' she trailed off, thinking sadly of Lily and how much she missed her. But she told herself she must not be sad. Lily was most likely living happily back at home, and has most likely completely forgotten about her.
'Why won't you ever speak of your past?' Claret asked her.

‘It’s best forgotten about’ Lilith replied sombrely.
‘Is it really that bad?’ Claret persisted.
‘Like I said’ Lilith smiled flatly. ‘Best forgotten about.’
‘I told you my story’ Claret said.
‘That doesn’t mean I have to tell you mine’ Lilith replied, pursing her lips as her temper shortened. ‘This isn’t a game you know.’
Lilith remembered the time Claret had first introduced herself. A strange looking woman she was, unusually tall and skinny, with hair one side short and blonde and the other side long and black. She had raised an eyebrow, the muscles in her thin face twitching.
‘I'm Claret. I chose this life to spite my father. But I’ve decided I like is so much I may even stay forever. The money is especially satisfying. What's your story?’
Lilith had told almost nothing of her own past to anyone over the months she had been here. Not to Claret, or the other girls, or even Charlotte.
‘One day’ Claret said folding her skinny arms. ‘One day you will tell me. I'm simply burning with curiosity. You are so interesting after all.’
‘Thank you’ Lilith replied sardonically.
‘Such a curious puzzle you are’ Claret was going on.
‘Stop trying to analyze me’ Lilith ordered. ‘I find it most tiresome.’
‘Hey Lilith’ Sonya voiced. ‘Don’t you have a client soon? You don’t want to keep him waiting do you?’
‘Oh is that the time?’ Lilith fussed. ‘How do I look?’ she asked her sisters.
‘Beautiful as ever’ Sapphire answered. Her red-haired sister.
‘In time!’ Claret called after her as Lilith sped through the door. It was typical of her to always have the last word. But Lilith didn’t care much for her games.
She hurried down the corridor, pausing briefly to check herself in the mirror before entering the room. And that’s when she saw him.
He was incredibly handsome, with wavy blonde hair and perfect features; he was like a prince out of a fairy tale. Lilith faltered at the sight of him, momentarily forgetting herself.
He turned towards her slowly, as the door to the bedroom swung shut behind her.
‘You look beautiful.’
Lilith blushed despite herself. For a moment she averted her eyes, brushing a strand of white hair behind her ear, before remembering herself and meeting his gaze again.
She smiled seductively at him.
‘I was about to say the same about you’ she gleamed at him as she approached. Lilith stopped before him, smiling with soft eyes.
‘I like the way you wear your hair’ the man said.
Lilith’s hair was plated and tied up behind her head, leaving her neck and shoulders exposed.
‘Here’ he said reaching behind her and pulling out the pin that held her hair up in place.
Lilith’s plate fell free down her back, he took it, placing it over her shoulder for him to see.
‘There’ he spoke softly. ‘That’s better.’
Lilith’s breath caught in her throat. For a moment she wasn’t sure what to do. She had never met a client so bold and confident. He knew what he was doing, and was as charming as she had been trained to be.
‘What is your name?’ she asked him.

‘Edward.’
She purred under her breath approvingly, eyes glinting with warmth.
‘Here’ she said, circling around him and placing her hands on the shoulders of his waistcoat. ‘Let me take this for you.’
‘You're trying to undress me already?’ he smirked, submitting as she slipped the waistcoat off him.
She chuckled lightly, unable to hold it back.
‘We’ve only just met’ Edward went on. ‘Shouldn’t we exchange names first? I still don’t know what you're called.’
‘Well’ Lilith smiled playfully. ‘I feel now I have some power over you.’
He grabbed her then. Suddenly and unexpectedly, shoving her against the wall and pressing his body against hers. Lilith’s breath caught in her throat as she stared in surprise back at him. He was so close to her, she could feel his warm breath on her lips; her heart was racing as he held her wrists up against the wall.
‘Do you feel powerful now?’ he spoke with a hint of a growl in his voice, holding her tight.
Lilith could only stare back wordlessly.
He smirked at her, before letting go and stepping back.
‘Don’t worry’ he said, sitting back on the bed. ‘I promise not to hurt you.’
Lilith was forced to calm her breath. She had never had a client so confident, had never had a client so forward that took the lead. She thought quickly then that she had to take the lead.
She smirked back at him, turning her back on his carelessly and moving towards the drinks cabinet in the corner of the room.
‘I think we both need something to help us relax’ she said as she poured each of them a glass of red wine.
She sauntered over towards the bed he sat, handing him the tall flute. She sat next to him and crossed her leg over the other, leaning back onto the bed, resting with one hand upon the luxurious blankets, and the other holding the flute.
‘Tell me something exciting’ she said to Edward.
‘When I was young’ Edward began, ‘I went walking on my own one day. I was not supposed to, my mother was ever so protective of me, but I was very curious about the world in my younger days. My parents were often angry at me for not listening, and I often got in trouble, but I couldn’t resist.’
‘And?’ Lilith sang happily. ‘What did you see?’
Edward flashed a sly grin towards her, before turning away and continuing.
‘I would often sneak into the manor of the rich lord that lived nearby and steal all sorts of things to make my family’s life better. We were not very well off for money at the time. But after a while I think the lord of the manor was cottoning on, and one day, I saw a great knight on his land. Terrifying he was!’ Edward said dramatically. ‘A hulking giant of a man, he had a terrible burn that scorched half his face and body. I remember his bare are reaching out for me and that dreadful damaged skin…diseased it looked, and sickly. I managed to escape, but not before a slew the beast where he stood.’
‘How?’ Lilith said in wonder. ‘How did you achieve such a thing?’
‘There was a pulley system’ Edward explained, ‘in the barn where I fled, that was used to hoist up great bales of hay on a large platform to a higher level. I lured the beast to the right

spot, and cut the rope that held the platform up, killing him where he stood. He died, but not before he shouted his fury and curses at me. I hear his voice, even today. His body died that day, but his anger still lives, and followed me…'
'That is a wonderful story' Lilith gleamed at him. 'I am frightened now. I hope his spirit doesn't find us here.'
'Oh no' Edward shook his head. 'He only comes when you are most vulnerable. At night, when you sleep.'
'I hope I am safe tonight' Lilith answered. 'You are giving me shivers.'
'Oh don't worry' Edward reassured her. 'He only comes for me. His anger and lust for revenge is never ending. He will get me one day, of that I am sure. But not until I am old and grey, and am ready to be taken.' He smirked at her. 'If he were alive now, I could take him on again, and win.'
When he was finished with his tale, he drained the rest of his wine, placing it on the bedside table. Lilith's heart skipped as he leant over her to reach.
He straightened up again.
'It's your turn now' he said to her. 'You tell me an exciting story. How did you get those scars on your face?'
Lilith stared off into nothing for a moment in thought. Then she spoke.'
'When I was young' she began, 'I was foolish enough to get myself lost in the woods one day, and I stumbled across a strange beast.'
'What sort of beast?' Edward asked curiously. 'A deer? A boar?'
'A dragon.'
'A dragon?'
'Yes' Lilith smiled, 'like the kind you read about in fairy tales. Large leathery wings…fire-breathing…lots of scales…lots of teeth.' She frowned in thought. 'A truly vicious creature it was, with death in its eyes.'
'What were you doing walking in a forest with a dragon?'
'I was looking for gold' Lilith confessed. 'I brought a silver sword with me to defend myself, but alas, the creature was too much for even me to handle. And so I had to run away. I stumbled and fell off a cliff. The thorns that grew out of the rocks scratched my face on the way down, and I've had these scars ever since.'
'A truly fascinating story' Edward said scratching his chin, 'and one I certainly don't doubt the credibility of.'
'I have had…' Lilith admitted, 'an eventful life.' This at least was the truth.
He moved swiftly then, using his weight to push her back on the bed. Lilith gasped in surprise, lifting her hand up suddenly to steady the wine-glass she held, careful not to spill it.
'Let me take that from you' Edward said carefully as he plucked the glass from her fingers and placed it on the table beside the bed. 'There' he said. 'That's better.' He regarded her closely. 'Now. What must I do…' he said, as he slowly lifted the skirt of her dress up her leg, '…for you to tell me your name?'
'Well' Lilith replied out of breath. 'I can think of…a few things…'
He moved himself on top of her then, seemingly suddenly possessed by a powerful lust. Lilith drew a sharp intake of breath as he began to bite at her.
'No' she whispered to him. 'You must not mark me.'

He leant back then, looking into her face.
‘You're right. I must not mark such a beautiful flower.’
Lilith blushed as she gazed up at him. She wrapped her arms around the back of his neck, pulling him closer into a kiss.
A fire burned within her as the two became evermore passionate. Lilith’s breath came as a shudder as he tore at her clothes, pulling the dress down her shoulders to get to her. Lilith’s head swung back as his nails ran down her back. She turned over, so he could untie the rest of her dress and pull it from her. She drew away from him, crawling backwards up the bed and beaconing for him to follow. He began to unbutton his shirt, never taking his eyes from her as he did so. She moved closer towards him, running her fingers over his smooth chest. His skin was cool like marble and she saw then how lean and muscular he was. His body was beautiful, and perfect, just like the rest of him.
She helped him slip his shirt over his shoulders, and lose the rest his garments before he joined her on the bed.
Lilith leant back as he came bearing down on her. He hesitated for a moment, touching his thumb to his lips in thought as he considered her, eyes roving all over her, taking in ever last detail.
‘You're beautiful’ he said.
‘I was about to say the same about you’ Lilith gasped beneath him.
Her hands tightened on the bed sheets beneath her.
‘I want you’ she breathed, running a hand between her own thighs.
Edward smirked.
He lay down beside her, propped up on an elbow facing her.
‘You're just teasing me now aren’t you?’
‘Is there anything wrong with that?’
‘Normally it’s me who’s doing the teasing’ she said to him. ‘I'm not used to it being the other way around.’
‘I know.’ His eyes glinted as he said this. ‘I thought it would be nice for you to try something different.’
He moved closer to her, leaning over her with an arm resting across her chest so she could not move.
‘I know what you like’ he breathed into her ear. ‘I know what you want.’ He smirked. ‘Let me give it to you.’
She drew a sudden sharp intake of breath as he slipped his fingers between her legs, throwing her head back and arching her back. She grasped tightly onto the sheets above her head.
Edward held her down as he worked; smiling as her body tensed and she began to moan.
He moved quickly until she was finished, leaning back as she lay gasping heavily and shaking on the bed, her skin a hot flush. But he gave her little pause, leaning over her again and pulling her legs apart.
‘My turn’ he whispered to her.
He moved on top of her fully now, moving his hand back between her legs. Lilith tensed again as he pushed inside her, smiling up at him with red cheeks.
He lifted her knees up, running his hand over her chest as he thrust forwards. Lilith moaned in pleasure as Edward moved faster, leaning down and kissing her deeply as he continued.

Outside her door Lilith's sisters began to gather, leaning with their ears pressed against the woods.
'What's he doing to her in there?' Bebe mumbled.
'Whatever it is' Claret said beside her, 'I'm jealous.'
A short time later, the two collapsed on the bed.
'That was….' Lilith gasped, '…incredible.'
Beside her Edward smirked. He rose quickly from the bed, beginning to change.
'Wait' she whispered to him as he made to leave. 'My name' she said. 'It's Lilith.'
'I know' he said turning back to her with a knowing grin. 'Your sisters told me.'
He bowed his head to her, picking up his waistcoat before leaving, casting her one last look before he closed the door behind him.
After he had gone, Lilith let out a heavy sigh, falling back on the bed and smiling, holding her hands over her heart. She lay there on the bed for minutes, completely naked, feeling a wave of different emotions coursing through her.
She opened her eyes, at last, staring up at the ceiling at the many coloured floating crystals that hung from strings from the beams.
She sighed again deeply, feeling his name on her breath as she spoke it.
'Edward' she smiled gleefully. 'What have you done to me?'

She was deeply distracted that evening. Several times her sisters had to repeat themselves when they spoke to her, and on one occasion, shake her back to the real world.
'What has gotten into you today?' Bebe asked her, removing her hand from her shoulder. 'I hope your fantasies are pleasant ones, because you are spending a lot of time with them.'
They were in the dressing room at this time, preparing for bed.
'I'm sorry' Lilith said, tucking a strand of her white hair behind her ear. 'I was just…I mean…'
'You know' Claret began. 'You've been acting giddy like this ever since that gentleman left your room earlier. Did he do something to you?' Maybe he put you under a spell.'
'I am under no spell' Lilith frowned.
'I wouldn't be so sure' Claret teased.
'What did I tell you about trying to analyse me Claret?' Lilith waved a finger at her. 'I'm not going to give into your games.'
'Just ignore her Lilith' her sister from beside her answered. Sapphire untied her red hair, letting it fall around her shoulders. She admired herself in the mirror briefly, before turning to Lilith. 'She's just jealous.'
'Jealous?' Claret echoed. 'Why would I be jealous?'
'Did you see him?' Sapphire said to Claret. 'What am I saying, of course you saw him, we both did, and I must say' she spoke turning to Lilith now. 'What a handsome young man indeed.' She pulled her dress over her shoulders then, almost completely naked as she crossed the room for her nightdress.
'He asked us your name you know' Sonya cut in.
'It doesn't matter' Lilith waved dismissively at the others. 'It's unlikely I will ever see him again, and if I do, it's probably because he will be visiting one of you.'
'Do you think so?' Bebe asked enthusiastically. 'I would very much like to receive him.'

‘I'm sure you would’ Claret frowned.
‘It’s getting late’ Lilith sighed. She was already in her white nightdress. ‘I'm going to bed. Goodnight all of you.’
‘Are you coming to the theatre with us tomorrow Lilith?’ Bebe asked her.
‘Sure. What time?’
‘Four, or thereabouts.’
‘Alright. I’ll be there. Sleep well my sisters.’
Lilith returned to her room alone. She lay in bed; the sheets had been changed to fresh ones. She wrapped the blankets tight around her, glancing at the clock on the wall. It was three in the morning. The people in this house always went to bed late because of the manner of their work, and as a result always woke late also. She would not normally wake in the mornings until at least ten, when she would begin her day.

Chapter Eleven
As Days Go By

‘Liliiiiiiiiiith!’
Lilith started awake, being abruptly ripped from her peaceful sleep and soothing dreams she blinked about her in confusion, wondering whose voice she had heard.
‘Lilith!’ came the voice again.
Lilith was just sitting up, when something bounced off her head.
‘Aaaaaarrrr’ she growl. ‘Who is that? Why am I woken so rudely and so early?’
‘It’s not early’ Claret sang, standing in the open doorway. ‘It’s nearly eleven.’
Lilith grumbled to herself, sitting up in bed and staring at the ball that rested on her lap now, the thing that had bounced off her head.
‘Why are you throwing things at me?’ Lilith glared at her.
‘It woke you up didn’t it?’
Claret, her tall and skinny sister, was dressed in a brown and black striped dress with a tight corset that matched. Her eyes were painted dark as usual, and she wore long black gloves of laced material.
‘It’s time to get up’ Claret said glowing at her. ‘The show at the theatre will start soon.’
‘I thought the theatre was at four’ Lilith protested.
‘Change of plan’ Claret beamed. ‘It’s at twelve.’
‘Twelve?!’
‘Yeah. You’d better get ready, and be quick about it’ Claret grinned widely at her.
‘Then get out’ Lilith glowered. ‘I need to change.’
‘Pardon?’ Claret laughed.
‘I need to dress’ Lilith repeated. ‘Will you please get out?’
Instead Claret did the opposite, stepping into her room with her hands on her hips. ‘How many men have you had’ Claret asked him. ‘Come now, we are all girls here. Why are you so coy about being naked? That doesn’t fit with the manner of your profession at all.’

‘It only fine around men’ Lilith said, pulling the sheets up to her neck so that they covered her whole body. ‘And only if there is one.’
‘But I'm only one here.’
‘You're not a man.’
‘So?’
Claret sat on the edge of her bed, leaning towards her.
‘Are you hiding something?’ she teased. ‘I would love to know what it is. Is it a secret? Are you keeping secrets from me?’
‘There’s a lot about me that you don’t know’ Lilith told her, leaning back and away from her as Claret leant closer. ‘And it’s none of your business if I choose not to tell you.’
‘Oh? But that only makes you all the more curious to me. Your secrets make me burn with interest and desire.’
‘Desire?’
‘Oh yes’ Claret purred, leaning closer again. ‘You are very interesting.’
‘Be interested by yourself then’ Lilith said pushing her back, ‘and give me space.’
Claret only giggled, grabbing her by the wrists and pushing her back on the bed.
‘Get off me Claret.
‘But why? I want to have some fun with you.’
‘I don’t like girls’ Lilith objected ‘You know that.
‘Oh Lilith’ she giggled again. ‘The more you resist, the more it makes me think you are denying yourself a secret desire. You want me. Admit it.’
‘I do not.’
‘You do.’
‘I do not.’
Claret giggled again, leaning forward to kiss her.
Lilith broke away before their lips could touch, fleeing to the other side of the room.
‘Get away from me Claret.’
‘Come here’ Claret teased, ‘let me help you undress.’
‘Don’t touch me!’
Claret began to chase her around the room, giggling joyfully all the while, jumping over the bed as she pursued her, until Charlotte appeared in the open doorway and rescued Lilith.
‘Claret’ came her voice sternly. ‘Leave her be please.’
‘Awwww’ Claret whined, slowing to a stop. ‘But I was having fun.’ She turned back to Lilith, winking then. ‘Next time perhaps.’
She sauntered from the room.
‘Thank you’ Lilith breathed, shoulders slumped. ‘It looks like I owe you a favour.’
‘I just happened to be in the right place’ Charlotte nodded to her. ‘I’ll leave you to your business’ she said, closing the door and giving Lilith at last her privacy again.

About half an hour later and Lilith was ready to go. She had to rush to make it on time, but managed to make herself presentable. Her white hair was washed and dried and tied up in a plate that was pinned behind her head, leaving her beautiful long neck free and shoulders bare. The dress she wore was striking, low cut, tight fitting and coloured deep blue. Her favourite colour.

‘Lilith, hurry up.’
Lilith grabbed her shawl as she hurried through the door, answering Sonya’s call, her heels clicking on the cobbled stone streets as she ran towards the carriage.
Sonya leant back from the door she held open, allowing Lilith to climb into the carriage and take a seat, closing the door after her.
‘I'm sorry’ she panted, fanning herself. ‘I didn’t mean to keep you waiting.’
‘It’s alright sister’ Bebe answered sitting opposite her; she wore an ostentatious bright yellow dress that matched her yellow painted eyes and yellow hair.
‘You look like a flower’ Lilith beamed at her.
‘Do you like it?’ Bebe asked her, patting the skirt of her dress down. ‘I bought it yesterday.’
‘You always wear the same colours’ Sonya grumbled, leaning into her palm as the carriage jolted into motion. ‘Cant you be a little different?’ she asked Bebe.
‘Why would I want to be different’ Bebe said waving her away, ‘when I like who I am?’
‘You don’t complain about Lilith always wearing blue’ Sapphire, the red haired sister spoke.
‘I wear other colours sometimes’ Lilith said in protest. She giggled then, glancing at Bebe, Sonya and Sapphire. ‘My sisters’ she smiled. ‘You all look so beautiful today.’
‘We look beautiful everyday’ Sapphire said, eyes glinting at her.
‘And you're no slouch yourself’ Bebe said slapping her shoulder. ‘No wonder such a princely figure has fallen for you.’
‘Princely figure?’ Lilith echoed.
‘That man last night…Edward was it?’
‘Oh him’ Lilith said. ‘I had all but forgotten about him.’
‘Lair’ Bebe smirked.
‘It’s true!’
‘Let us not raise our voices’ Sapphire waved at them, ‘and let us not speak of clients. We have time off for us to enjoy ourselves. I don’t want to think about work.’
‘Me neither’ Sonya added, playing with an earring. ‘I'm excited about this show. Oh it’s going to be so much fun!’ she said clapping her hands.

They reached the theatre, and filled into their seats, from the highest seats at the back, they had the best view of the show. Sapphire instantly began to flirt with a man a few rows down, giving him looks and pretending to blush.
‘Stop it’ Bebe hissed. ‘It’s annoying.’
‘I'm just having some fun’ Sapphire said in her defence.
‘Well do it elsewhere’ Bebe said in an angry whisper. ‘We’re not working.’
Sapphire sighed dramatically, turning away and beginning to fan herself.
Beside them Lilith watched as the show began.
The show was a romantic comedy, about seven men professing their love for a man’s daughter, but the father finding none of them worthy. So the father set tasks for each of them to prove their worth, most of which the men would fail in amusing ways, for the tasks themselves were impossible. Only one man was able to succeed through the tasks, not by completion, but by trickery. It was towards the end of the performance, when this one man, cleverer than all the rest, stood at the top of a cliff, on the stage a set of stairs painted and disguised as a mountain. The task was to reach the moon and bring it back as a gift for the

daughter. Each of the previous six men had failed of course, and as the audience laughed and clapped their approval, the final man stepped forward to complete the task. He was a tall and slender figure, dressed in a purple suit with his face hidden by a laughing mask, as he made a mockery of the father's tasks. He stood at the height of the cliff, or in this case, the set of stairs, delivering a speech as he professed his love for the daughter. The moon, a hanging prop just out of reach, shone brightly above all their heads as the audience listened to the clever man speak. He faltered suddenly; the audience hanging onto his every word began to murmur amongst themselves at the pause. The clever man gathered himself, and continued, starting his sentence from the beginning, but again he couldn't finish.

Lilith as she watched furrowed her brow, her sisters either side of her glancing at each other.

The purpled dressed figure on the stage laughed suddenly, as if it had been nothing, and once again began his sentence over. But suddenly he stumbled, foot slipping off the top of the stairs. He fell down to the stage, and all the actors suddenly rushed to him, exclaiming and fussing to see if he was alright. The actor removed his laughing mask, and the audience all gasped in shock at the sight of him. His face was pale and sickly-looking, his skin flaking away. He began to shiver violently, as if he were freezing, despite many of those around him wearing short sleeves. His hand went to his mouth suddenly, his body convulsed, and he threw up what looked like thick-black sludge.

'The show is over!' one of the actors called, trying to shield the man from the audience, standing before him with his arms out. 'Hurry! Someone close the curtains!'

'I just want to put it from my mind' Lilith said to the others as they rode in the carriage back to their home. 'I want to just forget about this whole nasty business.'

'Me too' Bebe said glumly. 'It was horrible. What do you think was wrong with him?'

'Let's just…go home' Lilith said quietly, not wishing for an answer. 'I have a client tonight anyway.'

'Tonight is ages away' Sonya told her. 'We have hours yet, why don't we…?'

'No' Lilith interrupted. 'Just leave me be.' She turned from them towards the window, staring out at the town go by.

'Lilith?' Sapphire spoke up. 'Are you alright?'

'I'm fine' she mumbled. 'If you have plans….just make them between yourselves. I wish to be left alone.'

The carriage pulled up before their home shortly after, and Lilith was the first out, walking briskly towards the building, handing her shawl to the servants waiting inside to receive them and marching quickly upstairs before anyone could ask her another question.

When she entered her room however, she was pleasantly surprised to find Edward waiting for her.

He turned to her, with the same gentle expression as he had the night before, and smiled.

'I…had to see you.'

'I must say I wasn't expecting this' she said suddenly flustered. 'I…I thought my client was coming later….tonight….I mean…'

'I couldn't wait until tonight' Edward told her. 'You…left an impression on me' Edward confessed.

‘As you did with me’ Lilith beamed, gliding towards him having gathered herself. ‘We can start early. Here’ she said, reaching to unbutton his shirt, ‘let me help you.’
‘No’ Edward said, grasping her hand gently. ‘I…I want to talk with you.’
‘Talk?’
He smiled.
‘I want to get to know you’ he said.
Lilith gave a nod. ‘Alright then. Let me get us something to drink.’
‘No’ Edward said again. ‘I want a clear head.’
‘Very well’ Lilith continued not missing a step. She reached the drinks cabinet, sifting through several bottles before finding the right one and pouring them each a glass.
‘Here’ Lilith said handing it to him. ‘Relax’ she smiled when he hesitated, ‘it’s just honey water.’
Edward took it from her gratefully, downing it immediately and placing it upon the bedside table.
‘Oh’ Lilith coughed into her hand. She suddenly got the impression that he drank it to get rid of it, and that he didn’t really want it at all.
She placed her own glass back down again without drinking.
‘Is there something specific you wanted from me?’ she asked him.
‘You.’
‘But you said you didn’t want me’ she said moving towards him.
‘Since I first lay eyes on you’ Edward began, ‘I haven’t been able to get you out of my mind. I've been able to think of nothing else.’
She tilted her head uncertainly at then.
‘What would you call this?’ Edward asked. ‘Love?’
‘Love? Oh.’ Lilith turned away, covering her mouth with her fingertips. ‘We…cannot love. Not like that.’
‘But why?’
‘Because…we have to work.’ She turned back to him. ‘It…’ she began, ‘would be a conflict of interest.’
‘If I knew I would feel this way’ Edward began, ‘I would have savoured the moment, and not….’ He turned away. ‘If I knew I would love you, I would have wanted our first moment together to be special.’
She placed a hand upon his arm. ‘Was it not?’ she asked him.
He turned back to her.
‘It was’ he said. ‘But…it was all too rushed.’
‘Well…’ she said purring at him and moving closer, her lips hovering over his. ‘We can take it….*much* slower next time.’
He grabbed her firmly by the arms, turning his head away and pushing her slowly but firmly back.
Lilith stared back at him dejected, no it was more than that, it was hurt. No one had ever refused her like that before.
‘You're…serious about this’ she asked him. ‘Aren’t you?’

‘Since I first met you’ Edward spoke not looking at her, ‘I've not been able to think about anything else…but your touch. I….I want to get to know you…as a person…’ he looked at her again. ‘That is…if you want me.’
She faltered then, unsure of what to say.
‘I've seen the way you look at me’ Edward pressed. ‘I know you feel the same.’
‘I…’ Lilith stammered. ‘I don’t…’
‘Don’t try to deny it’ Edward said moving closer.
Lilith took a step back uncertainly. ‘I don’t…’ she began. ‘I mean…’
He embraced her tightly then, holding her to his chest, breathing in her sweet scent.
‘Lilith’ he whispered. ‘I love you.’
Her heart stopped in her chest. Her breath caught in her throat. Eyes wide in shock, she slowly reached her hands around Edward’s body, submitting to his embrace and holding him back. She nuzzled into his chest, fighting back the wave of emotions that swelled inside her.
What is this I am feeling? I've never known it before…

‘It’s not a very nice story I'm afraid’ Lilith was saying a short time later as they sat side by side on the bed. ‘I don’t think you’d want to hear it.’
‘I do’ Edward insisted. ‘I want to know everything about you, and the truth this time.’ He considered her. ‘How did you really get those scars on your face?’
Lilith glanced at him reluctantly, then looked away, she took a deep breath before speaking. ‘I was attacked’ she told him. ‘There was a time in my life where I was living on the streets, stealing just to stay alive. I was good at it too. But lessons were hard and you learnt fast, or else you wouldn’t make it, and the streets would take you, and no one would notice you were gone.’
‘What about your parents?’
‘My mother rejected me the moment I was born, and in my entire early life I was a burden to my father, who at best tolerated me. I was never loved as a child. I never fit in anywhere. My father spent most of my early life trying to get rid of me, trying to find me a new home, that’s why I travelled so much…….but none would take me.’
‘And you ran away from home?’ Edward asked her tentatively.
‘Yes’ Lilith said. ‘Eventually. I met a man, who previously showed me kindness. He took me in and cared for me, we were even engaged. But after a while things turned sour, and I was forced to move on. That’s when I lived off the streets, eventually Charlotte found me, mother of this house, and the one who runs the business. She gave me a new home and a new life……and I've been here ever since.’
‘Do you have any siblings?’
‘No.’
‘Any children?’
‘No’ Lilith scoffed.
‘How old are you?’
‘Twenty five’ Lilith replied. ‘Or thereabouts. What about you?’ she asked him hastily, before he could ask her another question. ‘Tell me about yourself.’
‘I work in an inn on the west side of this town. I live near there also. I have one sister and one brother I have not seen in years. They are both travelling, married last I heard. My parents

live far away, I've recently moved here to start a life of my own……let's see' he pondered to himself. 'What else? I love the colour purple, I enjoy ice-skating when it's cold enough, and taking long walks, and painting….there's nothing in my past of any interest. Now let's see, what else might you want to know?'
'Why did you move here?' Lilith offered.
'Well, I moved out of my parent's home when I was seventeen. My uncle offered me an apprenticeship as a shoe-maker, it was surprising good pay. I remember the day I first left, my mother, bless her; she was in tears as if she'd never see me again. I remember when I woke that morning…….'

They talked for hours together, each asking the other many questions and finding out much about the other.
The day outside began to darken, and after a time, Edward turned towards the window.
'I should go. We should meet again' Edward said rising. 'Perhaps next time' he turned back to her with a wink, 'you should visit me.'
'I'd like that' she smiled.
'And perhaps…' he added, 'you can think on my offer.'
'Offer?'
'My feelings for you' he clarified. 'I…I really care about you…'
He bent forward, brushing her hair back and kissing her on the cheek, before straightening again.
'Until next time' he said. 'Goodbye Lilith.'
'Goodbye' she mumbled at him, watching him as he left.
She sat there for many minutes, until there came a knock on the door.
'Lilith?' it was Charlotte's voice. 'I saw a man leave your room. Are you ready for your next client?'
'Send him away' Lilith called through the closed door. 'I am taking no more clients tonight.'

'I heard you refused to take any more clients last night' Claret told her the next morning at the first possible opportunity. 'It's that Edward again isn't it. You've fallen in love with him.'
'So what if I have' Lilith said stubbornly. 'I heard it was none of your business.'
'But how will you manage such a thing?'
'I will manage' Lilith answered defensively, folding her arms.
'You know it's a conflict of interest right?'
'Claret' Lilith sighed. '*Must* you go on? Your words are tiring me now.'
But' Claret persisted, 'you've intrigued me ever further. Who is this man?'
'I have to go' Lilith replied, having finished getting ready and rising from her chair, she headed out of the dressing room.
'You're going to meet him aren't you?' Claret called after her.
Lilith didn't answer, only waved back at her before slipping out of the room.

She left her home, marching through the streets with pride. She looked as always elegant and graceful. Today wearing a dress of deep purple, with a tight black corset and her white hair tied neatly up behind her head. Her shoulders were left bare, and around her neck she wore a necklace made of large amethyst stones set in silver.
She found Edward waiting for her beneath the clock tower where they had agreed to meet. He was dressed handsomely in a fine dark waistcoat and fitting clothes.
She sauntered up to him, and he turned towards her, spotting her from a distance.
'My lady' he said to her, taking her hand and kissing it as she curtsied to him. 'You look beautiful.'
She glanced up at him, behind her dark painted eyes.
'I was about to say the same thing about you' she replied.
He flashed her a smile, offering his arm for her to take. Lilith did so graciously, and the two walked together through the streets of the town, side by side.
It was a leisurely stroll as they made their way through the town and towards the park, Edward and Lilith's steps matching one another's, until Lilith slowed.
She turned to look to her side, seeing an old man wearing rags and sitting huddled against the wall. As she watched him, he coughed violently into a rag, leaving black flecks on the cloth.
He shivered violently, even though it was a warm day.
'Don't worry yourself with such things' Edward told her watching her. 'We shouldn't get involved.'
'That poor man.'
'He's sick' Edward whispered urgently under his breath. 'You shouldn't…'
She cut him off, placing her fingers over his lips.
Lilith took her shawl off from around her, bundling it up and approaching the old man.
The beggar continued to shiver as he raised his head, watching her with a distant glazed expression. He looked sickly pale.
Lilith crouched before him, offering the shawl for him to take. Tucked away inside was a small pile of coins, enough to live on comfortably for weeks.
'Take it' Lilith whispered to him. 'It's yours.'
The old man trembled violently; he lifted shaking hands hesitantly towards her, cupping the purple shawl.
Lilith let it slip from her fingers.
'There's enough to buy some medicine' she told him. 'There's enough to seek professional help.'
The old man stared back at her blearily, blinking several times.
Lilith rose, returning to Edward's side.
'That was a noble act' Edward said.
'I won't stand by and do nothing while others suffer' Lilith told him, 'not if I can do something about it.'
He smiled kindly at her. 'That's the Lilith I love' he said. 'I've never met a kinder or more interesting person than you.'
Lilith turned away at this, blushing.

They spent the whole of that day in the park, walking the woods and the lakes at the edge of the town.
They had a picnic, watched an entertainer from the street juggle for them, fed the swans by the lakes and fed the sparrows in the woods from their hands. The little birds were incredibly tame, and would even hop up your arm to sit on your shoulder.
Lilith smiled with joy as she watched the birds flutter about them, laughing at Edward who had several on his head.
After that, they slipped away to share a secret moment together in the woods, holding each other, enveloped deep in a kiss. They sat together in silence for an age in each other's arms, simply experiencing all that was around them, each enjoying the others company.
They left only when it began to grow dark, Lilith meeting a group of her sisters along the way as Edward walked her home. They saw Lilith and Edward together, giggling and waving at them. Lilith simply frowned in amusement as they went by, pulling Edward so they did not stop.
He walked with her up the steps of their home, pausing at the door.
'It's been fun' he told her.
'Yes it has' she beamed back.
'I hope we can do it again.'
'I hope so too' she replied.
Edward held her hands in his, holding them to his chest. He leant forward as Lilith raised her head, kissing her one last time before they parted ways.
'Until next time' he said to her, drifting back down the path towards the street.
'I'll be waiting' Lilith gleamed, backing towards the front door.
'Goodnight' he said to her, before turning and striding away.
'Goodnight' Lilith whispered after him, before placing a hand on the door and pushing it open.
The servants as usual greeted her at the door, enquiring if there was anything she needed, but Lilith shook her off. When she reached the changing room upstairs, the mood amongst her sisters felt a little different.
'Is everything alright?' she asked one of her sisters.
'Almost' the sister named Classic replied. She had pale skin and wavy hair that was pure white like Lilith's. 'Claret's fallen ill. She won't be taking any clients tonight.'
'Is she alright?' Lilith asked with worry laced in her voice.
'You can go see her if you like' Classic said. 'She's in her room.'
Lilith went to do so immediately.
'I didn't think you would come to visit me' Claret said to her when Lilith entered her room.
'You're my sister' Lilith told her. 'Of course I'd come to visit you.'
Claret smiled weakly, letting out a sigh and holding her hand to her forehead.
'Thank you…' she whispered.
'How are you feeling?' Lilith asked her.
Claret drew a shuddering breath.
'Cold…' she replied.
Lilith leant forward to touch her hand.
'Your skin is freezing' she uttered, drawing back.

Claret lay in bed, with several blankets already over her, and within the room it was very warm.
'I'll go get you another blanket' Lilith whispered turning away.
She returned shortly after with several, placing them over Claret.
'Thank you' Claret whispered. 'That's awfully kind….'
'Do you want anything else?' Lilith worried. 'Are you hungry?'
'No….I don't think my body could manage to eat anything right now.'
'If there is anything else I could get you' Lilith went on, please say so.
'I will' Claret said.
Lilith straightened. 'I should go now, I have clients tonight.'
'How did your day with Edward go today?'
'Great' Lilith smiled.
Claret blinked slowly. 'Good' she said. 'I'm glad.'
She closed her eyes as if to sleep.
'Are you going to be ok?' Lilith asked.
Claret opened her eyes again.
'I'll be fine' she told him. 'You'll see, in no time at all I will be myself again, and you'll want to get away from me.'
Lilith chuckled to herself at this.
'Goodnight then' she said to Claret, leaning forward and kissing her forehead. 'I hope you get well soon.'
'I promise I will' Claret uttered wearily back. 'Then I will have my way with you.'
'Goodnight Claret' Lilith said sternly, slipping out the room and closing the door after her.
Claret would spend the next few weeks in bed, being cared for by her sisters, and visited often by doctors who still were unable to help her.
They visited now only as habit, and to check on her condition.
Lilith went to her own room to change and did so quickly before her first client arrived.
'I've been waiting for you' she told him seductively. 'Come now, don't linger in doorways, there's much pleasure to be found in here.'
He approached her.
The man took her hand in his, pushing her onto the bed and leaning over her. He made love to her, Lilith arching her back and moaning as he moved inside her, all the while thinking of Edward.

She met with Edward again the next day, unable to keep him from her thoughts. They spent that evening together in the park, staying out late into the night. They sat on a bench beneath the full moon, watching the fireflies floating through the air around them.
Edward caressed her gently, pulling her close.
'Lilith' he whispered into her ear. '…I love you.'
She shuddered as she heard this, her heart racing.
'I love you too' she breathed, heart swelling.
He lifted her from the bench, carrying her in his arms and into the woods. They made love again beneath the canopy of the trees, Edward being oh so gentle with her.

Afterwards they lay side by side in the warm night, sleeping for hours on the forest floor, until Edward took her home, kissing her one last time before slipping into the night.

Over the weeks that followed, her love for Edward had blossomed, and with it, a growing concern. A fear stirred in her heart, and she worried that he would leave her, like William had, when he found out what she really was.
She thought to herself, that it might break the relationship, but she couldn't continue with the way things were, knowing this secret in her heart might change him. If she were to lose him, she would rather it sooner, or else the heartache might be worse.
And so, that evening she wrote him a letter.

Later that night, Edward came to her room to find her. Instead in her place he found a note written by her. It said that she had something important to tell him, and that she wanted to meet him at the bridge over the canal by the bakery. He knew the place, and so, he set out to find her.

Lilith waited for him on the bridge, heart racing, and thoughts of how best to tell him running over and over again in her mind. She held her hands tightly together to stop them from shaking, feeling her palms beginning to sweat.
She took a slow and steady breath, but it was not enough to calm her. When she saw Edward approaching her, her heart leapt in her chest, and she began to feel terrified.
I'm going to lose him forever…
'What a pleasant evening we find ourselves' he declared to her. 'What a fine time it is to be alone together.'
'Edward' she said firmly, turning to face him. 'There is something important I have to tell you.'
'As your letter stated' Edward waved her away. 'Let's first go for a boat ride.'
'What?'
'Why else would you ask to meet by the canal if not for a boat ride?'
'I thought….' she began.
'You thought correct!' Edward interrupted her happily. 'I would love to sail these gentle waters with you by my side.'
Lilith began to feel sick, and she felt that complying with him would make hearing the news even harder when she finally told him.
'I really think…'
'Don't think' he whispered seductively to her, placing his fingers on her lips to silence her. 'Just listen to me. Just trust me.'

A short time later, and they had taken one of the boats docked at the small harbour, and were gently gliding across the waters. Edward was staring at Lilith in silence; Lilith was staring at the water.
'You're very quiet tonight.'

‘There is much to worry about for me’ Lilith said to the water. ‘Fear and worry wracks my mind.’
‘Fear?’ Edward sighed. ‘I suppose I should hear what you wanted to say to me.’
He tilted his head at her, leaning back in the boat.
‘So?’ he said after a time. ‘What was it you wanted to tell me?’
‘A growing concern in my heart’ Lilith replied. ‘Edward…’ she said turning to him. ‘I am not like other people. Most if they knew what I was would call me a freak. I am…….I am…….’
She could not bring herself to say it out loud, and so she allowed herself to show him instead.
She resigned herself, taking a deep breath and in her mind preparing for the inevitable.
She released them.
From her back grew forth great wings, unfurling and stretching towards the sky.
‘You're…’ Edward started in shock.
‘Yes’ Lilith answered, unable to look him in the eye. ‘An angel. A fallen angel. A usurper and betrayer of god……there is no place for me in heaven nor on earth.
‘I don’t believe in such things’ Edward answered.
Lilith lifted her gaze, meeting his at last.
‘How many other people have you shown?’
‘I…’ she began. ‘None.’
‘When was the last time you revealed them?’
Lilith bit her lip nervously.
‘Not since I was born’ she whispered. ‘That’s why…my mother rejected me. Because I was born with wings.’
‘So you’ve never flown? Not in your entire life?’
‘No’ Lilith said weakly. ‘My father would never allow it. He didn’t even want to see them.’
‘Curious.’
He reached out to touch them; Lilith tensed as his hand drew nearer her, flinching slightly as his fingers touched her feathers.
‘They're so beautiful’ Edward said, running his fingers down her wings as if he were playing a harp.
‘What?’ Lilith breathed.
‘They’re beautiful’ Edward repeated, loudly more firmly this time.
‘Do you really think so?’
‘I know it.’
Lilith gleamed at him. ‘They’ve caused me…problems in the past, like a curse.’
‘These wings are no curse’ Edward told her. ‘They are a gift. I know you are different to other people, but your differences are not something you should feel ashamed of, but something you should cherish, and hold dear.’
‘Edward…’ Lilith breathed.
‘The reason I love you’ Edward said, ‘is *because* you are different.’
Lilith blinked the tears from her eyes, her heart swelling with pure joy and happiness.
‘Oh Edward’ Lilith shuddered, over wash with emotion. ‘…I love you…’
She reached towards him, pushing him back gently down against the boat. Their lips touched, and Lilith held his hands in hers as their boat moved gently across the water, her beautiful wings outstretched, the feathers at the tips trailing in the water. The moon above them lit the

world below in a celestial silver glow, the town lightened further by the many lamps that burned brightly now in their glass holders, held up by posts that were painted black, it looked like the lights were floating.
Lilith closed the kiss, leaning back she looked into his face, laughing and crying at the same time as she caressed him.
'I think' Edward spoke slowly and carefully, 'we should make our way back to the shore.'
They helped each other row across the still water, one to each oar on either side of the boat and matching each other's rhythm perfectly. They reached shallow water at a quieter section of the town, the boat bumped gently against the soft bank, and Edward leapt off the boat, pulling it up the grass and leaving it there to rest.
He straightened, holding a hand out for Lilith to take, she did so, and he led her from the boat and up the grassy bank. Concealed by the blank walls of the buildings around them, they had their own little world here within the town, a world they shared together.
Edward let go of Lilith, facing her and gliding backwards. He slowed to a stop, smiling at her.
She moved closer, falling into him, her mighty wings were glowing, lighting up the grassy verge around and casting shadows upon the walls behind him.
'Lilith…' Edward breathed. He took her wrist in his hand, slipping his other hand around her waist. He pulled her close, their lips touching again. 'Let us be together, here, now and forever.'
He pulled her down upon the grass on top of him.
'I love you Lilith.'
She leant over him, reaching forward to touch him gently, the wings that grew from her receded into her back, all signs of their existence vanishing.
'You've stolen my heart' she whispered to him.
He watched her, eyes piercing into hers.
He sat up slowly, pushing her to the side and rolling on top of her. His lips hovered over hers as he hesitated.
My angel' he spoke softly to her. 'Mine and mine alone.'
She held him in a heated embrace, protecting him from the chill of the night, as they made love under the stars
'Would fate have us live a life as one' she asked him as they lay side by side, 'or is this love's blind chance?'
She turned her head towards him; he was smiling at her silently.
'Look' she whispered, facing ahead again towards the sky, 'a shooting star.'
The tiny comet left a silver trail as it shot through the sky, before quickly disappearing.
'Are the stars not beautiful tonight?' she asked him, pointing upwards and reaching out as if wanting to touch them.
But Edward would not look at the sky, only at her.
'You're not looking' she pouted.
'You're right' he smirked at her. 'I'm looking at something far more beautiful.'
She rolled over on her side, hands together placed beneath her head as she watched him with a smile upon her lips.
'Edward…' she said. 'I'm so tired…' her eyelids drooped.

‘Are you alright?’ he asked with concern, reaching to touch her. ‘You're boiling hot…your skin…’
‘It’s always like that’ she said opening her eyes. ‘Always.’
‘You look exhausted.’
‘I've not revealed my wings…’ she mumbled to him, ‘for a very long time…. It’s….tiring.’
Her eyes closed again, and she fell still, breathing slowly.
Edward watched her for a moment, before sitting up and lifting her in his arms, making his way back to the boat and placing her gently down.
He returned the boat where they had found it, carrying her in his arms through the streets and back towards her home.
‘It’s alright’ he said quickly to the ladies of the house as they began to protest in alarm. ‘She’s fine, she’s just sleeping.’
They allowed him to take her to her room, watching from the doorway as he lay her down on her bed ever so carefully. He sat by her side, brushing back the hair from her face and leaning forward, kissing her forehead before leaving.
When he had gone, Lilith’s sisters all went into her room to check on her.
‘Sister? Lilith? Are you well?’
‘I've never been happier’ she mumbled to them without opening her eyes. ‘But I'm….so tired….’
Satisfied she was well they left her alone, closing the door and leaving her in silence.

The next morning, she rose early, full of life and joy. She strolled from her room humming to herself, making her way to the dressing room to choose a dress to wear that day. She entered the room with a spring in her step, but slowed quickly, seeing her sisters around her sitting about the room. Normally they would be talking animatedly together, laughing and joking and smiling. Now they sat in sullen silence.
Lilith’s heart twinged as she sensed something was deeply wrong.
‘What happened?’ she asked.
Though she spoke quietly, her voice sounded loud in the utterly silent room.
Bebe was the one to speak up. She was sitting closest to her.
As she lifted her head, Lilith saw her yellow eye-makeup running down her face with her tears, her heart sinking further.
Bebe spoke.
‘Claret’s dead.’

The funeral was shortly after.
Lilith, like every single one of her sisters was caught in a state of shock. They had not realised Claret was this sick, and her sudden death had spread alarm and panic through the house.
Their services were immediately shut down after that, until further notice. The sisters were frightened, not knowing why she had died, each feared for their own lives now.
Lilith stood alone, slightly away from her sisters who huddled together nearby, crying into handkerchiefs and holding each other as the coffin was lowered into the ground.

‘They say she threw up black sludge’ one of her sisters wept. ‘I also heard rumours of a man at the theatre collapsing and doing the same.’
‘Shh’ the sister beside her whispered as she held her. ‘Not now.’
Lilith heard these words, though she stood a distance away. Most of the other sisters must have heard it too. Lilith could sense the misery in the air, mixed with fear and uncertainty.
Behind her black veil she watched as the priest read the sermon over the coffin, as the hole was slowly filled with dirt. Standing mutely, she stared blankly, unresponsive to the situation, besides the silent tears running down her cheeks.
The mood in the house was different after that, and for days the sisters grieved. With no work to do, and not being in the mood for leisure, they just sat around the building, many with hair unkempt, no makeup, some even refusing to get out of their nightdresses for the entire day. Most didn’t even eat any more, choosing to stay in their beds. Everyone was thoroughly depressed, and scared.
Weeks passed, weeks of boredom and misery. And though it was selfish of her, Lilith could not keep Edward from her mind. But he hadn’t come to visit her. He hadn’t even come to knock at the door. Lilith had asked several different people several times, but none had seen nor heard from him.
After several days of this, she decided to go out to look for him herself. He had told her previously about where he lives, and so she went to find him herself. She tidied herself up and chose a dress, blue. Then set off to find him.
She didn’t tell her sisters she was going out, they would barely notice anyway, so caught up in their grief still. Lilith chose to walk alone, instead of hiring a carriage. She decided she needed the fresh air, after spending so long indoors. She found the area Edward lived, asked around for directions, then headed where she thought was the right way. There were several houses clustered together here, and she had to ask again for directions at the inn nearby where Edward said he worked. The innkeeper told her he was working today, but was at the moment on his break. He told her he was outside around back, and she thanked him, and went to find him.
Heading around the building, off the main street, she rounded a corner and saw him there. But she pulled back slightly, hovering at the corner, seeing him talking to a woman.
They were speaking in hushed whispers.
Lilith watched closely.
Edward tilted his head, smiling kindly in the same way he used to smile at her. He lifted his hand to brush the woman’s cheek lightly, and then he kissed her.
Lilith could not believe what she was seeing.
First she felt shock, then disbelief. Then anger.
Lilith’s heart contorted with pure rage at the betrayal. It stung in her heart and hurt more than she thought possible. She snarled. Grinding her teeth and balling her fists. Lilith turned and stormed away, heaving as quickly as she could back to her home.
When she reached her room, she lost all control.
She screamed at the top of her lungs, grabbing a vase and throwing it across the room. It hit the wall and shattered. The flowers crumpled and water spilled everywhere. The door opened and Sonya stumbled in.
‘Lilith what on earth…?’

'*GET OUT!*' Lilith screeched at her. 'Get out you filthy bitch!'
Sonya need not be told twice, she instantly left the room as quickly as she had entered it.
Beyond the door Lilith glimpsed her other sisters beginning to gather outside. She saw Bebe's look of disbelief, and Claret's expression of only mild surprise.
Lilith screamed again, reaching for the next item that was closest in reach. The beautiful and expensive piece she hurled across the room, hitting a painting and knocking it off the wall. The frame cracked as she reached for something else.
'Lilith!'
She whirled around, seeing Charlotte standing before her, a look of furry in her eyes.
'What is the meaning of this?' she demanded. 'Have you lost your mind?'
Lilith stared at her for several seconds, holding the clock in a hand.
After a time, she let it slip from her grasp.
Lilith crumpled to the floor, covering her face with her hands and balling hysterically.
Charlotte swing the door shut behind her.
She wandered casually across the room, coming to sit upon the bed, tucking her dress behind her legs as she sat.
'Tell me girl' she said to Lilith. 'What is troubling you?'
'Edward' Lilith answered at last in a whisper, not trusting her voice to speak. 'He…….he…..' she buried her face again, crying once more. 'I loved him' she whispered. 'But he…..*betrayed* me.'
'Ah.' Charlotte said in understanding. She bowed her head. 'He has been dishonest with you.'
'No' Lilith said. 'He has been dishonest with *her*.'
Charlotte watched her silently.
Lilith raised her head. 'I saw the ring on her finger' she glowered. 'They have been married for a while.....or so it appeared.'
'I know it hurts' Charlotte told her. 'But you will get over in time.'
'No……I loved someone once. But when he found out what I really was he rejected me……Edward didn't though. He loved me even though he knew what I was, and for that…I loved him even more. Even more than William. My first love.'
'Sometimes' Charlotte said, 'it's just not meant to be.'
'All my life I've been different. All my life I've tried to find a place for myself in this world, and I thought that twice now, I had succeeded. But I've come to realise….there is no place for people like me in this world.'
'What are you talking about?' Charlotte asked raising an eyebrow. 'We are all outcasts here. You know that.'
'I am different' Lilith replied. 'Different from all of you. I'm sorry. I should have told you.'
Lilith rose to her feet, turning from Charlotte. She paused briefly as she made her way across the room, reaching back to place a thing in Charlotte's open hand. It was a single, long white feather.
Charlotte lifted it curiously in her hand, taking a good long look.
'Lilith?'
She turned to her, seeing Lilith open the window to her room and pushing it wide.
'I'm sorry' Lilith gasped. 'I can't stay here anymore.'
'Where will you go?'

‘I don’t know’ Lilith answered, as she climbed through the window. ‘Away from here. Somewhere far…anywhere.’
‘Please don’t go’ Charlotte said rising. ‘We will miss you.’
‘I'm sorry’ Lilith said again. ‘But…I cannot stay.’
She clambered through the window, grabbing onto the drainpipe nearby and climbing smoothly down. Charlotte ran to the window, grabbing the sill with white fingers, staring down in disbelief.
‘Lilith!’ Charlotte called down to her.
Lilith paused to look back up at her.
Charlotte furrowed her brow, squinting through the dark, struggling to see Lilith. Only seeing her white hair clearly.
‘Who are you? Charlotte called down to her. ‘You’ve never really told me.’
‘I don’t know myself’ Lilith answered in a slightly raised voice so that she could be heard. ‘I did not have the life I should have done. My path has changed many times over the years.’ She raised her head. ‘Thank you for taking me in. Thank you for all you have done. But I have to go now….I have to move on.’
She turned from the window without a backwards glance; she turned from the life she had become so happy in. She thought she would stay with her sisters, thought she would build a future here. But it was not meant to be. Lilith brushed tears from her eyes at the thought of her sisters, realising, she would never see any of them ever again.
Lilith blinked furiously, glaring through the night as she stormed away from her home, heaving in no particular direction. It was shortly after that, she noticed she was being followed by several male figures.
Lilith glanced back without slowing her pace. She marched around the corner. The men followed after her. They walked past the place she hid, and onwards, slowing as they looked about for where she had gone. One of them pointed in a certain direction down one of the streets. The others went down this way.
Above them, from the rooftops, Lilith watched, perfectly safe. She leant back, away from the edge, and sat against the tiles, knees folded up. She shuddered in the cold, rubbing her arms vigorously as she began to shiver. Her whole body began to shake. She began to sob again, burying her face in her folded arms.
She gasped suddenly at movement at her side. Lilith jerked her head upwards to see a figure standing on the rooftop with her. A cloaked figure, wearing a crow’s mask.
‘It’s you!’ she said. ‘I haven’t seen you since….what are you doing here?’
The figure simply regarded her with empty eyes.
‘What will you do now?’ the figure asked her.
Lilith stared silently back at the figure, unsure of what to say.
‘Don’t give up’ the figure spoke urgently, before vanishing before her very eyes.
Lilith stared at the spot the masked figure had stood, wondering in her mind what she would do now.
She stayed on the rooftop for several hours, curled up and lying on her side. When she decided to go, she did so swiftly. Lilith left the town altogether, and walked along the roads leading away to other places. She walked in sight of the road, but kept a distance from them, for her own safety.

She walked for hours, until she finally came across an empty barn, where she found shelter from the coming rain. She collapsed in a hay pile, feeling utterly exhausted, both physically and emotionally drained. She slept a deep sleep, and did not wake until the next morning, when she was discovered by one who lived at the farm. A young gentleman went into the barn and found her there.
'Dad!' he called. 'There's a woman here!'

PART 4
Nine years later

Chapter Twelve
The Four Strangers

Lilith was now thirty-four years old or there about. She had stopped keeping track of her birthdays long ago.
For nine years she had lived at this happy place. The barn on the farmland she had chosen to rest at that night had been her home for nine long years. The family that lived there were good to her, and for nine years, they asked almost nothing of her, save from her share of work to keep herself and them going on the farm. They never asked more than what was needed of her, and never asked her of her past. They were always kind to her, always worrying about her, and never mistreated her or parted with her a harsh word. Not once in nine years. And yet, Lilith had never been more unhappy in her life, and she didn't know why.
Lilith worked hard on the farm, but winters were always quiet and boring. The days dragged listlessly by as she stared beyond the rain soaked windows in the spare room where she spent her time alone, watching the storms come and go until another year flew by, where she would once again wear short sleeves and tie her skirt up to work the fields. Despite the hours of work, it was not as hard now as it had been when she had lived with William, where the hours were longer and the work more laborious. She was now a mature woman, and more beautiful, taller and slender than she had ever been. Dan, the young man who had found her sleeping in the barn all those years ago, had grown a deep attraction for her, an attraction that had only grown stronger as each year passed. And even after nine long years, he still loved her, even though, after all that time, remembering her twice broken heart, Lilith had not once returned his affections.

One day, Lilith was off riding alone. She had been asked by the family she lived with to organise a price for the horse they were selling. Not the one she rode, but another back at the farm. The young black and white foal was a spirited and lively thing and would surely fetch a good price. So that's where she was heading now, to a small town where a market that ran once every month would help her find the right buyer. But it was a trip from which she would never return. She would think back later with regret how the family would have worried sick for her, and would have tried to find her. Dan especially would be heartbroken. He would not have understood.

Lilith was riding alone along the dirt road that led to the small town. It was still early morning, and was quiet on this road. She had not seen another on this road for a very long time.

And then something happened that had never happened to her before. She felt a sudden sharp sensation she could not understand. It hit her like a wave, and she was consumed with a powerful urge to follow. She tensed suddenly, jerking her head to the side towards a cluster of small mountains that sat a few miles from the path. Great grey pinnacles of rock where no humans lived, and very few animals. Beneath her the horse tossed its head nervously, feeling the sudden tension in her and prancing on the spot. Lilith stared at these mountains hard, briefly trying to calm the horse, but never taking her eyes away from the distance. What she felt was unnatural, and yet…so normal. Lilith had never felt this way before; she instinctively knew however, that no one else she had ever known in her life before could ever feel this way. She somehow knew that this feeling was exceptional.

She pulled the horse from the path, and made her way towards the mountains at a hurried pace. The horse quickly tired and slowed its stride. Lilith watched as her destination drew closer agonizingly slow. When she at last reached the base of the mountains, she was forced to leave the horse behind.

Lilith climbed up the side of the steep slope, grabbing the jagged rocks and boulders and pulling herself up onto safer paths. Her ascent up the mountain side was slow and exhausting, but she eventually reached the place that drew her.

Halfway up the small mountain, was an area that was shielded by rock from the rest of the world. There was almost like a clearing in the centre, where a relatively smooth mound of rock grew up in a gentle arch. All around her the walls of the 'clearing' were jagged and harsh-looking. It was an empty isolated world in these mountains. Lilith doubted that anyone had come through here in a very long time.

She stepped into the centre and approached the mound of rock, resting on her knees and running her open palms over the course surface below. She could feel something strong here. The air pulsed and vibrated all around her. She could hear a low humming in her ears.

Lilith lay down on her front, and as she pressed an ear to the ground below her, she swore to herself that she could hear whispering. Several voices all talking over one another.

Lilith drew away again, staring hard down at the ground below.

I have to get in she thought. *I have to know what that is.*

For hours she sat there at the edge of the 'clearing', staring at the mound before her and wondering how to break it, leaning against a rock with legs tucked up, and arms around her knees. She thought long and hard for something that might help her, until at last, she noticed something. A bolder, high up on a cliff ledge above, sat precariously on the edge as if waiting for her. Lilith suddenly realised that if she pushed it, it would land directly in the centre of the mound. She climbed the cliff edge as quickly and carefully as she could. Her body was shaking as she did so. She was very thirsty, and had not eaten in a while now, but she pushed herself on.

She reached the top of the cliff behind the boulder, and leaning up against it, pushed with all her might. The boulder tipped over the edge and fell, impacting the ground below with a great crash. When Lilith glanced over the edge tentatively, she saw the boulder had disappeared

inside the hole it had created in the mound. Within the hole, everything was dark. It appeared to be a cave inside.
Lilith climbed carefully back down the rocky slope, stepping lightly across the mound once she had reached stable ground again. She leant forward cautiously, staring into the hole. A dim light from the sky above lit a tiny portion of the cave below her, and as Lilith stared down, she saw four faces staring back up at her.
'Be careful!' one of them said angrily. 'You could have killed one of us.'
She gasped stepping back in shock. As she did so, she heard the voices continue.
'Be quiet' another voice snapped. 'You'll scare them away.'
Silence fell again, Lilith almost felt as if they were waiting for her to approach again. She did, cautious of the edge.
'Hey!' another sang jovially. 'It's a girl!'
The one that had spoken moved forwards, stepping into the circle of dim light immediately below Lilith. Tilting his head up at her, Lilith saw him clearer.
He had short shaggy white-blonde hair, with three long plates on one side. His skin was tanned and his eyes a misty blue. He dressed in close-fitting black clothes that must have once looked fine and handsome. Now they were faded and worn at the knees and elbows.
'Hello there young lady' the figure smiled up at her. 'How do you feel about giving me a hand and helping me out of this dreadful pit?'
Lilith didn't speak. Her breath was caught in her throat as she stared down at him in silence.
'Very well' the figure said turning away from her. 'If you will not help me, then I will help myself. Reuben' he said to a figure behind him. 'How about you give me a one up?'
Another figure stepped forwards, bending on a knee and allowing the other one the climb upon his back. The kneeling figure stood with the tanned man on his shoulders, who reached towards Lilith, hands grasping at the edge of the broken ceiling the boulder had fallen through.
Lilith quickly withdrew as the tanned man hauled himself up into the open, lifting his body through the hole and climbing out onto the ground level with her.
'Jump boy' he hollered down to one below him. He strained as he helped pull up the man whose shoulders he had stood on moments before.
Reuben was a much older and wiser looking figure than the first that had appeared, with a stronger build, a chiselled jaw and high cheekbones. His stare was intense. He had blonde hair swept back, and though he looked malnourished, he looked powerful still.
Reuben turned to consider Lilith before him. He moved a step closer to her. Lilith moved a step back. The other figure leapt to his side to stare at Lilith.
'What on earth happened to your face?'
Lilith immediately bowed her head, half-turning away and lifting a hand to cover her face. She suddenly felt painfully strong the scars on her face, they tingled uncomfortably, like they had the day after she had first received them.
'Gael' the man named Reuben said in a low voice turning to him. 'You should speak in a more civilized manner when addressing a lady. I thought you knew better.'
'I'm sorry' the man called Gael immediately hastened. 'I spoke without thought.' He bowed to Lilith. 'Please forgive me.'
Lilith did not speak. She only stared back at the two, incredulous.

‘Hey!’ came another voice from the cave below them. ‘We’re still down here! I hope you haven’t forgotten!’
Reuben moved away from Lilith and towards the edge of the hole to help the others. Gael remained where he was, staring at Lilith with hungry eyes. Lilith could not meet his gaze.
The next to be pulled up, was a tall man. He had long black hair and light blue eyes. His skin was pale and his frame was slender. He stumbled as he straightened, shielding his eyes from the light. Around his neck, he wore a shining red stone that glistened in the sunlight.
‘Thank you Reuben’ the new figure said.
‘Not at all Aski.’
Aski turned to pull up the last still left below them in the cave. Jaspin was a handsome man in the prime of his life. He had a gentle gaze about him, with steely grey eyes to match his hair. But it was not the filthy grey Lilith had once had, but more like pure silver, like the edge of a sword. Lilith stared at him hard, seeing something strange in his eyes as she looked past Gael. Something familiar.
It was grief.
Jaspin met her gaze in silence. He did not speak.
‘Ahhh’ Aski breathed sighing heavily. ‘The sun. It feels so good on my skin.’
‘The breeze also is fresh’ Reuben added.
‘I feel like I want to dance and sing and jump around!’ Gael said happily, spinning on the spot and stretching his arms out wide.
Jaspin said nothing.
‘Tell me miss’ the man called Reuben said as he approached her. This time Lilith did not back away. ‘How did you find us?’
‘I sense you here’ she replied. ‘It was a strong feeling…something I've never felt before.’
‘You're like us then?’ Gael smiled at her. She met his gaze and he winked at her. She turned away.
‘It’s best to ignore him if he’s bothering you’ Reuben said. ‘That’s what the rest of us do.’
‘Hey!’ Gael huffed indignantly.
‘Don’t ruffle your feathers’ Reuben said waving him away, not even looking up as he spoke to Lilith. ‘We mean you no harm miss’ he said to her, blotting Gael from his mind. ‘Would you do me the honour of telling us your name?’
The silent Jaspin looked up expectantly at this.
‘It’s Lilith’ she replied.

Chapter Thirteen
Lilith’s Story

The strange band of five returned to the foot of the mountain. Lilith found that her horse had wandered off, and was nowhere to be seen. Lilith’s shoulders slumped in disappointment. They would have to walk the rest of the way, wherever they were going.
It was decided that they would head to the nearest town to find something to eat. Lilith pointed the direction, and they began their long walk.

By the time they arrived, they were all exhausted. The group found an inn where they could settle, and the five of them shuffled through the door and picked a table in the corner. Gael winked at the barmaid as she came to take their order. He never took his eyes from her pretty face until she turned and left them, then he let out a sigh and a yawn. Around him the others at the table sat slumped and weary. Aski had his head in his hands, Reuben was yawning widely, and Jaspin sat back in his seat, staring off into nothing and as silent as ever.
'So what's your story then?' Gael asked Lilith when their food had arrived.
'Story?' she repeated. 'I have no story.'
'Of course you have a story' Gael objected. 'Everyone has a story.'
'Then what is yours?' Lilith asked him. 'How did you get trapped inside that cave? And how long were you there?'
'Oh I'm not going to tell you just yet' Gael told her slyly. 'You tell me first about yourself, and I will then tell you about us.'
Reuben looked up from his meal. 'We were imprisoned there by a strange person wearing a crows mask. They said we had to be kept safe. We had limited food and lived in the dark for weeks.'
Gael rolled his eyes at Reuben.
'What did you need to be kept safe for?' Lilith asked him.
'For you to find us' Reuben replied. 'I know' he added quickly. 'It sounds farfetched doesn't it? I didn't believe it either. But then you came.' He took another bite of bread. 'It's funny how things turn out isn't it?'
'You always must spoil my fun' Gael complained.
'Why did you need me to find you?' Lilith asked.
'So that you can set us free' Reuben explained.
'Then why imprison you in the first place?' Lilith said.
'Reuben' Gael spoke in a singing voice. 'Who's teasing who now?' he shook his head at him. 'Why don't you just tell her?'
'Tell me what?' Lilith asked flatly.
'We are all needed to find the earth maiden' Aski spoke up.
'The earth maiden?' Lilith repeated.
'We will speak about that later' Reuben interrupted. 'I wish to enjoy this meal. Gods only knows how long it's been since any of us had a hot meal.'
'How did you get trapped inside that cave with no way out?' Lilith spoke up.
'Magic' Aski voice.
'I don't believe it' Lilith droned. 'There is no such thing as magic.'
'Of course there isn't' Reuben smiled at her.
Jaspin's attention slid across the room, away from those that sat at the table. He had not spoken a single word yet. Lilith was unsure at this point whether or not he was even able to speak.
'So' Gael sang again. 'What's your story then?'
'There is nothing exciting that I could tell you' Lilith said to her plate. 'I am….uninteresting.'
'I beg to differ.' Gael narrowed his eyes slyly at her. 'I think you have a……very interesting story indeed.' He tilted his head. 'How did you get those scars on your face?'
'It saddens me that you would judge me so.'

‘I was merely curious’ Gael said in his defence. ‘*That* would be an interesting story indeed.’
Lilith picked at her food reluctantly.
‘Perhaps another time.’
‘Where should we go after this?’ Aski spoke.
‘Does it matter where we go?’ Reuben said.
‘Where will *you* go?’ Gael asked Lilith. ‘You have a home don’t you? You could take us there.’
‘I have no home’ Lilith replied. ‘My home is where I stand.’
‘Then where did you come from?’ Gael pressed.
‘That’s in the past.’
‘But you must have parents’ Gael went on. ‘You don’t look like a beggar.’ He tilted his head to her again. ‘What is your story?’
Lilith raised her eyes to him slowly, staring at him deeply.
‘My parents disowned me when I was very young’ Lilith said. ‘My mother hated me. My father was indifferent. When I was born, I was named by a passing stranger because I meant so little to my own parents. And I *have* lived as a beggar……that’s how I got these scars. I was attacked in the streets by a gang.’
Gael drew back in silence. It was clearly not the answer he was expecting to get, and it had caught him a little off-guard.
‘Why don’t you leave her alone’ Aski glared at Gael. ‘And mind your own business.’
‘I was merely curious’ Gael shrugged.
‘Keep your curiosity to yourself’ Reuben shot. ‘And keep your mouth shut.’
Gael leant back with a sigh, turning away from the others and showing his hands in submission. He fell silent. Beside him Jaspin stared down at his lap.
‘Let’s just keep our minds on the present shall we?’ Reuben said. ‘At least for the meantime. Let us not think of tomorrow. Let us not think of yesterday. Let us live in today.’ He stabbed the lamb on his plate with his fork, lifting it and examining it before taking a bite. ‘Mmm’ he said. ‘Delicious.’
After a time of eating in silence Reuben spoke to Lilith. ‘Do you like lamb Lilith?’
She glanced up at him tentatively. ‘Oh’ she said. ‘No. Not really. It’s too fatty.’
‘But the fat is where the flavour is’ Reuben objected.
‘I don’t like the taste of lamb all that much’ Lilith replied meekly.
‘She’s right’ Gael sang happily beside her. ‘I like my meat without fat. I like my meat to be lean and beautiful. Like my women.’
‘Gael I swear to God, if you don’t keep your mouth shut I'm going to cut your fucking tongue out.’
‘Is that anyway to speak in front of a lady?’ Aski interjected.
‘I'm sorry’ Gael said hastily, covering his mouth and turning to Lilith. ‘You’ll have to forgive me, it slipped out.’
‘Slip it back in then’ Gael smirked.
Reuben snarled at Gael, banging his fist on the table in fury and gritting his teeth, though he didn’t speak.
‘I'm sorry’ Aski said to Lilith. ‘We’ve been trapped together for a long time, though it felt far longer than it’s actually been. You’ll have to excuse our behaviour.’

The silent Jaspin simply let out a breath and turned his head away, as if pretending the others did not exist to him.
‘I'm sorry if we seem……crude to you’ Aski finished, ‘a little rough around the edges.’
‘No matter’ Lilith replied casually. ‘I'm used to such things anyway.’
Aski opened his mouth as if about to speak, Lilith thought that perhaps he was about to ask of her past, but remembering what Reuben had said, kept his mouth shut.
He just smiled at her, and returned his attention back to his plate. ‘We are good people’ he said to her. ‘I just want you to know that, and because you're like us, I think we should stick together.’
Lilith watched him curiously as he continued to eat, cocking her head slightly at him.
She looked down at her own plate, and the fish that was half eaten. She was starving, and hadn’t had a proper meal in ages, not since leaving behind her home at the farm. But despite this, she couldn’t bring herself to eat anymore, and so she pushed the plate away and sat back.
Jaspin raised his head and glanced towards her briefly before turning away again.
Lilith waited in silence as the others ate. They ate a vast amount, except for Jaspin, who only ate one plateful of food.
‘Is that all you're having Jaspin?’ Reuben asked him.
Jaspin didn’t answer.
‘Don’t you even want dessert?’ Reuben asked him. ‘They have stewed fruit.’
‘Jaspin isn’t overly fussed on dessert’ Aski told him. ‘Remember?’
‘I just thought you’d eat more, I thought you were starving like the rest of us’ Reuben said to him.
Jaspin simply shook his head, but did not speak. It was the first time Lilith had seen him interact in any way with anyone so far.
Lilith was about to ask one of the others why he would not speak, but quickly decided against it. It was perhaps some painful reason, something of the past that should not be spoken of. Perhaps he had had his tongue cut out; perhaps he had been a prisoner.
Lilith observed him closely. He was mature, but well aged. His skin was like marble, and he had a look of wisdom about him.
Lilith stared at him for a few second; then Jaspin glanced at her. Lilith drew a breath and looked away, diverting her attention.
She waited while the others finished eating, having consumed an astonishing amount of food, they all sat back, sighing happily.
‘I am weary now’ Gael announced. ‘I think perhaps we should find a place to rest.’
‘We could stay at the inn’ Reuben suggested.
‘No’ Gael and Aski said at once. They exchanged a glance before Aski continued. ‘I think we’ve been indoors and behind walls for too long.’ He smiled. ‘I would like to sleep under the stars.’
‘That is a brilliant idea’ Reuben nodded.
‘There is a forest near here’ Lilith spoke. ‘We could sleep under the stars, but the trees would protect us from the wind.’
The others nodded at this approvingly.
‘I say we should leave immediately’ Gael said, ‘I'm struggling to keep myself awake now, if I lie down I will surely be fast asleep within seconds.’

‘Me too’ Aski agreed.
‘Let’s go now’ Gael said, rising to his feet, ‘before I fall where I stand.’
‘How are we going to pay for this food’ Lilith spoke up.
The others faltered.
Her heart began to sink.
‘You don’t have any money?’ she asked the others.
‘We’ve been trapped underground for weeks’ Gael told her. ‘Of course we’ve no money.’
‘So how do we pay for this?’
‘We don’t’ Gael gleamed at her.
At this point the innkeeper had heard them speaking, and came over to investigate.
‘Is there a problem here?’ he asked.
‘Only if you make one’ Gael smiled back.
The others rose to their feet as Gael and the innkeeper began to argue.
‘I could have you arrested for this’ the innkeeper was saying in a raised voice.
‘You’ve got to find us before you can catch us’ Gael answered arrogantly back.
‘I think’ Lilith finally spoke up after a time, ‘that I know how to solve this problem.’
‘And how is that young lady?’ the innkeeper glowered at her.
‘May we speak in private?’ she asked him.
The innkeeper faltered at this, suddenly a bit uncertain.
‘Please?’ Lilith asked kindly, bowing her head shyly, her lips tweaking in a smile.
‘Um…’ the innkeeper said. ‘Alright. I suppose…’
They walked away from the table together, the others staring suspiciously after them.
‘Can we go to a room alone?’ Lilith asked him in a sly voice under her breath so that only he could hear her.
This time he did not question. They left the main eating area, and went to a quiet room at the back of the inn. Lilith closed the door after her.
‘We won’t be disturbed here?’ she asked him sweetly. ‘Will we?’
‘No’ the innkeeper said. ‘We won’t.’
‘Oh…good.’ She bowed her head. ‘Now…about payment…’
He waited.
Lilith raised her head; then stepped towards him, sliding her arms around him and kissing him deeply.
He held her back, hands going to her waist and pulling her dress up.

‘I've told you several times already’ Reuben snapped at Gael, ‘we’re not leaving without her.’
Gael grumbled under his breath, sitting back down with his feet propped up on the table, while the others stood around him.
‘What's taking so long?’ Gael whined. ‘I'm so tired; I want to rest somewhere comfortable to sleep.’
‘Be patient’ Aski told him calmly. ‘She’ll get here when she gets here. She’s only been gone for a few minutes….look…here she comes now.’
Lilith approached them from the next room. She came alone.
‘I've sorted something out with the innkeeper’ she said briskly. ‘We can go.’

‘But what about the food?’ Aski spoke.
‘I've paid.’
‘I thought you said you didn’t have any money’ Reuben answered flatly.
‘I've managed to persuade him to forget about it’ Lilith told him.
‘How did you do that?’ Reuben asked her.
‘I'm just good at what I do’ Lilith replied in a bored tone, not properly answering the question.
Beside them, Jaspin gave Lilith a strange look.

The five of them left the inn together; they walked the short distance to the woods that grew near the small town and passed the boundary of the trees, stepping lightly on the forest floor.
‘Such a beautiful forest’ Aski spoke, raising his head to the branches, stroking bark of the tree as he walked past.
‘It is…peaceful here’ Reuben agreed, following after him.
Lilith walked after Reuben, moving silently. The forest around them was eerily still. The gentle glow of the sunlight touched the lush green leaves in the branches above them, and as the small group moved onwards; their steps were muffled by the soft moss they walked on.
‘It’s dry’ Gael spoke when they had reached a clearing in the forest, kneeling down and running his fingers over the moss. ‘And soft’ he said, stretching forwards until he was lying on his front.
He rolled onto his back, gazing up as the blue sky above them, shining brightly through the gap in the trees. He brushed his shaggy white-blonde hair back, flicking away the three long plates that grew on one side.
‘Join me’ he said to the others, reaching a hand up at if to touch the sky. ‘It’s so…’ he let out a sigh, falling asleep without even finishing his sentence. His hand dropped to his side, and he became still.
Reuben was the next to submit himself to sleep, crouching to the ground and coming to lie on his side, like Gael, he too was asleep in seconds. Aski was the next one to lie down, smiling once at Lilith before his body relaxed.
Now it was only Lilith and Jaspin left. Jaspin stared at Lilith silently, before turning and walking away. He came to rest a short distance away from the others, choosing to separate himself from them. Lilith wondered briefly why he could exclude himself.
As Jaspin lay down with his back to her, Lilith saw she was the only one standing.
She let out a sigh, before lying down too, resting on her side briefly before rolling onto her back.
She wondered then about the strange men she found herself surrounded with, and wondered what she would do tomorrow.
‘When it comes’ Lilith whispered to herself, closing her eyes.
Exhausted from walking so far and eating a large meal, she was quickly floating through her dreams, dreaming of pleasant things.

The five of them slept peacefully that evening, and the whole of the night into the next morning. Lilith only woke because she felt a touch on her cheek. She opened her eyes; the first thing she saw was a little white flower, sprouting from the moss before her. She turned

her head, looking up she gasped in surprise to see Gael was leaning over her. He had been watching her sleep. Lilith sat up and drew back, leaning away from him and breathing slowly to calm the pace of her heart which had quickened.
'What are you doing?' she asked of him.
'You're so beautiful when you sleep' he said, reaching for her to caress her cheek, 'even with those scars.'
Lilith didn't react as he touched her skin tenderly. Gael smirked at her, drawing back.
'It's been too long since I've had a woman' he said to her.
'Well you're not having this one.'
'We'll see about that' he smirked again. 'I'm sure you will fall in love with me soon' he gleamed at her wagging a finger.
'We'll see about that' Lilith answered shortly.
'Gael leave her alone' Reuben snapped, rising to his feet nearby.
Gael moved away as Aski nearby began to rise. He stood tall, stretching and reaching his hands into the sky. He pulled his long black hair behind his shoulders and straightened the chain around his neck that held the shining red stone, glistening in the sunlight.
'That meal and sleep did us a lot of good' Reuben spoke, 'but I think we need to clean ourselves up, and buy some new clothes.'
'And wash our hair' Aski chipped in, rubbing his hands on his clothes to get off the feeling of grease after he had touched his hair.
'You're right about the clothes certainly' Gael said, picking at a loose threat on his sleeve. 'I feel like a beggar in these. I want to look my finest, like I usually do.'
'You preen yourself like a cat would do' Aski noted.
'And why not?' Gael shrugged. 'Cats are noble creatures.'
'Arse licking vermin' Reuben grumbled.
'Hey' Gael scowled, placing his hands on his hips. 'I object to that. You know the race of Tithites used to worship cats?'
'Yes' Reuben turned to him. 'They also used to practice incest. Why do you think their race died out?'
Gael was about to retort, when Lilith spoke over him.
'Where is Jaspin?'
The three men all looked towards her; then glanced around.
'I'm sure he's about somewhere' Aski said casually. 'I wouldn't worry.'
'Does he normally wander off?' Lilith asked uncertainly.
'Don't know' Aski shrugged. 'We don't really know him.'
Lilith's cheek twitched at that. 'Do…' she began slowly, 'none of you know each other?'
'Not until we were trapped in that cave' Reuben said.
'By that figure in a crows mask' Lilith mumbled. 'I remember.' *Could it be the same figure I saw myself, all that time ago?* She thought. 'So what happens from here?' she asked aloud.
'We stick together' Reuben said. 'There are very few of our kind now.'
'Some would see that as a blessing' Lilith grumbled.
'Speak up' Reuben said loudly.
Lilith raised her head to him. 'We are freaks' he called loudly. 'All of us.'
'And who told you that?' Reuben frowned.

‘Many’ Lilith answered, speaking in a normal tone now, ‘throughout my life.’
‘Hey’ Aski said to her, moving closer. ‘If we are freaks’ he said placing a comforting hand on her shoulder, ‘then we are freaks together.’
She turned her head to him. His smile was kind and friendly, not the lustful one that Gael would give her.
‘Reuben is right’ Aski told her. ‘We should stick together. I won’t speak of the past, but you said yourself that you had no home to return to. That is true?’
‘It is still true’ Lilith spoke meekly, turning away. ‘But it is not the first time I've been forced to make a fresh start. I am more than capable of caring for myself.’
‘A lady alone in the world?’ Aski questioned, moving his hand away from her.
‘Look at my face’ Lilith said turning her head to face him again. ‘I endured this and lived, thrived even. I can handle whatever the world has to offer me.’
‘If you say so’ Aski replied.
‘Even so’ Gael spoke up, ‘we should stick together, I've rarely seen our own kind, and to have five of us gathered together…well…’ he said stepping back and crossing his arms, ‘that is something that does not happen very often.’ His eyes lifted to Lilith’s then, and he glided over to her. ‘You never know’ he said lifting her chin with a finger, ‘one of us might even be the black and white angel.’
She stared blankly back at him.
‘Who?’
‘An ancient line, long lived, and the most powerful of our kind.’
‘You think he is here?’ Lilith asked him flatly.
‘He?’ Gael asked. ‘Why not she?’ he bent his head low to hers. ‘It could be any one of us’ he whispered seductively. ‘It could be you.’
Lilith felt his breath on her lips. He leant forward as if about to kiss her, but then he drew back, smirking at her again and moving away.
Lilith watched Gael watching her, grinning at her wolfishly. Nearby Reuben and Aski were glaring at him. They had not intervened, but were watching Gael very closely.
‘So you think we should stick together’ Lilith spoke to all three of them. ‘Where do we go?’
‘To buy some new clothes’ Gael said.
‘And wash our hair’ Aski added.
Reuben looked on silently.
‘Buy’ Lilith said, feeling the word on her tongue. ‘With what money?’
‘We’ve no money’ Aski admitted reluctantly. ‘We’ll steal if we have to.’
‘Have you stolen before?’ Lilith asked him.
‘Nnnnooooo’ Aski replied slowly. ‘But…how hard can it be?’
‘Harder than you might think’ Lilith told him. ‘I once stole a pair of earrings from a woman, I plucked them from her very ears as she wore them, and she never noticed my hands.’
‘You're a thief?’ Reuben asked in surprise.
‘Not a path I chose willingly you have to understand.’
‘So you can steal for us?’ Aski spoke.
‘If I must’ Lilith answered reluctantly. ‘It’s been a few years since I've been forced to do so…I might be a bit rusty.’ Her attention suddenly drifted towards Aski, and the shining red

stone he wore around his neck. ‘That’s a nice jewel you wear’ she said striding towards him. ‘It’s so bright.’
She stumbled then, grabbing onto Aski’s shoulders for support as he moved towards her, helping her back to her feet to stand again.
‘Are you alright?’ he worried.
‘Yes’ Lilith spoke confidently. ‘You however’ she said dangling the necklace before his face, ‘are out of pocket.’
Aski’s hand touched his chest then where the jewel had sat, feeling nothing there.
Lilith smirked at herself, feeling glad her skills had not faded. She handed the necklace back to him.
‘That’s incredible’ Aski said in awe, taking the thing back and clipping it around his neck again. ‘How did you learn such a thing?’
‘You learn fast on the streets’ Lilith told him. ‘Or you don’t make it.’
Gael threw his head back laughing, clapping his hands at such a spectacle. ‘The lady has skill’ he declared.
It was at that moment when Jaspin returned. The others noticed his appearance, but said nothing as he took his place silently amongst them.
‘We head to the next town then?’ Reuben asked. ‘That would be the best place for us to go.’
‘Let’s go then’ Aski said clapping his hands.
They left the woods with Reuben leading the way, and Jaspin following a few steps behind them, walking in complete silence.

Chapter Fourteen
Old Habits

The next town they came to was larger than the one they had left, and it was here that the group of five found exactly what they were looking for.
At the edge of the town was a large bathhouse filled with many guests, some of which stayed overnight in rooms that were situated in a floor above the baths. Lilith reluctantly paid entry for all of them, after spending nearly an hour combing the streets outside, looking for targets, misfortunate people to rob.
She dumped the bag of coins upon the counter, the receptionist before her took bag and emptied the contents, counting the amount inside while Lilith and the others waited patiently. The well presented, finely dressed pretty woman glanced up at them, shooting each of them a strange look, especially the men who were filthy, with their dishevelled clothes, dirty skin and greasy hair.
Lilith stood closest to the counter, watching the lady with a deadpan expression. Behind her Reuben and Aski did the same; Jaspin avoided her altogether, instead paying more attention to a nearby wall. Only Gael smiled widely at her, shooting her his most charming smile.

‘This is us on a bad day I'm afraid’ he explained to the receptionist. ‘Soon enough we will return to our best forms! Like a phoenix rising out of the ashes, or a caterpillar morphing into a butterfly!’
‘Caterpillars don’t morph into butterflies’ Lilith said back to him without turning. ‘It’s the chrysalis that morphs into the butterfly. Idiot.’
Aski and Reuben both laughed at this, Reuben covering his eyes with a hand, almost on the verge of tears as Gael sniggered sheepishly beside him.
‘I'm sorry’ he said to no one in particular. ‘How foolish of me. I should really brush up on my knowledge before handing out compliments.’
‘Well’ Lilith said finally turning to him, ‘you’ve got a long way to go.’
Aski’s laugh heightened, as Reuben’s turned into a cackle, the noise of both their mirth drowning out Gael’s protests.
Only Jaspin had not reacted in the least, not even a flicker of a smile. It was as if he hadn’t heard them speak at all. As if he were in a world, completely on his own.
‘My lady’ Gael bowed at Lilith sombrely, placing a hand upon his heart as Reuben and Aski beside him began to calm down. ‘You are just too cruel.’
‘Well when you make it so easy…’ Lilith said.
‘Oh’ Gael said, grimacing and clutching at his heart, ‘…the pain.’
‘I'm sorry for this trouble’ Reuben spoke over him, addressing the receptionist, ‘but we have travelled a very long way, and as I'm sure you can tell; we’re all in desperate need of your services, so…if you don’t mind…’
The lady behind the counter straightened, slipping the coins she had been handed into the till before addressing them. ‘Gentlemen through the door to my left’ she said. ‘Ladies through the door to my right. We hope you are pleased with our services and have a pleasant experience.’
‘We will try our best to enjoy ourselves’ Gael beamed at her.
‘We’ll meet you here later’ Reuben mumbled to Lilith as he and the others moved off towards the door.
‘Farewell until next time’ Gael gleamed at her. ‘My little seraph.’
Lilith watched without expression as the four of them vanish through the gentleman’s door. Once they were gone, she turned and headed to the ladies door, walking alone.
Lilith went to a private cubicle to undress, leaving her clothes folded neatly on the side along with a comb that she happened to be carrying with her, a pocket watch and a few meagre coins.
These were all the things she owned in the world now.
Lilith brushed her white hair back over her shoulders, nowadays she always left her hair down, always, even when she had lived and worked on the farm for nine long years. She hadn’t tied her hair up since the day she worked as a prostitute. She remembered how Dan, the young man who had found her sleeping in the barn all those years ago, had always complained of her long hair being a health hazard around all the machinery. She had never listened to him.
Dan she thought miserably. *I'm sorry to have done this to you. I know you harboured deep affections for me…I only wish I could have made you understand.*

Around her as she made her way, other women walked back and forth and bathed and talked and minded their own business, all completely naked. Lilith averted her eyes from them, having chosen to keep her underwear on to preserve her modesty; she found a separate bath connected to the larger pool in the middle of the hall. Most of the woman had chosen to bathe in the larger communal bath alongside many others. The smaller baths on the edges, separated by a low wall but sharing the same water, was where smaller groups of women gathered, or those in pairs. Lilith found a small bath that was unoccupied, and tentatively slipped into the water.

It was warm, pleasant. Not too hot and not too cold. The water that entered the bathhouse was one that ran from a great river that came up from a cave at the foot of the mountain the town was built against. Further back in the bathhouse, in a part of the building the guests were not allowed, was where the water was heated by great fires that burned constantly thanks to the machines that kept them going. The water that ran through the building was always fresh, and pleasant, running through the town in tunnels underground once it left the bathhouse, and out into the open sea.

Lilith sat back against the bath, breathing a heavy sigh.

The water felt good against her skin, felt soothing, especially after walking for so many hours, she had begun to dream of this moment.

She picked up the soap and a fresh cloth sitting beside the bath in arms reach. These were often replaced with fresh ones by the 'keepers of the pool', who entered regularly to check on the guests. Lilith dunked the cloth into the water and began to wash her face, and used the soap to wash her hair, her long beautiful white hair. She remembered briefly a time when it used to be grey, and filthy, like the air in the city she once lived in.

She minded herself as she continued to clean, after a few minutes she noticed another woman watching her, one a few years younger, with light blonde hair tied up and bright green eyes. She was a slender figure, with a look of mischief about her.

The woman noticed Lilith had spotted her. She smiled, and glided through the water towards her. Lilith began to grow tense.

'Hello stranger.'

Lilith stared reluctantly at the woman who drifted towards her. 'I'm Sammy' the woman said, leaning on the wall that partially separated the small bath Lilith sat in from the rest of the pool. 'Hey, why do you still have your underwear on?'

'I'm shy' Lilith replied shortly.

Sammy smiled kindly, an expression of genuine happiness.

'I've not seen you around here before' Sammy said. 'Are you a traveller?'

'I…suppose' Lilith spoke slowly.

'My parents own this place' Sammy went on. 'I come here often, you meet a lot of new faces, and a lot of old ones too.' She giggled happily.

'What about your parents? Do they live around here?'

'Not really.'

'What is their profession?' Sammy asked. 'What do your parents do?'

'I…I don't know.'

'You don't know what your parents do?' Sammy repeated loudly.

Lilith's brow knitted together, feeling a simmer of annoyance within her as she hugged her knees, glaring at the water.
'How do you not know what your parents do for work?' Sammy persisted, as Lilith's patience shortened.
'My parents and I do not exactly see eye to eye' Lilith explained through gritted teeth. 'We don't speak to one another.'
'Why not?'
Lilith's eyes flashed, she shot an expression of fury towards Sammy.
'I'm an angel' she said.
Sammy froze, her expression that of shock, and then disgust.
'You have no place in heaven or on earth' she sneered, before moving away again.
Lilith watched Sammy move back towards the middle of the pool and rejoin her friends, glancing back at Lilith scornfully.
Lilith turned away from her angrily, heart hammering inside her chest.
After that, she washed quickly and left the pool as soon as she could, taking one of the clean white robes offered to guests on their way out. She picked up her things and made her way back to reception to wait for the others. It was only a short time later that they appeared.
'You look ravishing' Gael immediately said to her.
Lilith turned her sullen eyes towards him quietly, the anger that had enveloped her heart had quickly dissipated, and she had returned now to her listless self.
'You looked beautiful before' Gael said to her, 'but now…' he smiled a perfect smile, 'you look heavenly.'
He reached out a hand to touch her face; she caught him by the wrist suddenly before he could touch her, staring at him without emotion.
'Keep your hands to yourself' she told him flatly.
Gael balked then, stumbling mentally, as Reuben smirked behind him.
'I told you didn't I?' he said to Aski. 'The woman can look after herself.'
Behind them Jaspin looked on in silence.
'So where should we go now?' Reuben asked the others, as Gael took his hand back.
'I think the best course of action' Gael declared dramatically, 'is to buy some new clothes.'
He and the others wore the same white robes as Lilith wore, their original clothes they had entered with they had discarded.
'We need a tailor' Aski said. 'Lilith, do you think you could steal some more money for us?'
'I would prefer you keep your voice down when talking about that' Lilith said to him deadpan.
'Would you do it for us?' he asked her nicely. 'Please?'
'Alright' she sighed. 'I need some new clothes myself too.'

The group of five walked through the town a short while later, still wearing their white robes they had taken from the bathhouse, they walked the streets with bare feet.
'This is a wonderful town' Reuben cried joyfully, throwing his arms out and twirling as he went. 'Look at the beautiful lights on the strings that hang above us, they shine like jewels!'

Lilith raised her head to the black wires that zigzagged the streets above their heads, from these wires hung tiny lanterns in glass of many different and bright colours, inside which burned little fires.
These lights glowed ever brighter, as the sky began to darken, and the day draw to its end.
'Hurry' Gael prompted, 'we have to reach the tailors soon or they will close.'
Lilith followed after the others, walking a distance from them. It was a large town they had come to, the streets were busy with people, but not so many that it made it difficult to move. Lilith 'accidentally' tripped and stumbled into several people along the way, her hand like lighting slipping in and out of their pockets, snatching from them whatever they carried.
By the time she caught up with the others and reached the tailors, she had more than enough to pay for whatever they would spend.
'There you are' Reuben glanced back at her. 'What took you so long?'
She gave him a stoic expression and said nothing.
'We're at the tailors' Reuben said pointing to the building they stood directly in front of, as if it weren't obvious. 'Do you want to go in before us?'
'Why?'
'Ladies first' Reuben answered, 'and all that.'
Lilith let out a sigh and a tut, ascending the steps of the shop situated on the corner, and opening the door. The little bell above her head rang as the door opened, and she was immediately greeted by the shopkeeper.
'Good evening madam,' the tailor bowed, 'and gentleman' he added, seeing the other four trail into the shop after Lilith. 'And to what do I owe the pleasure?'
'We need some new clothes' Reuben told the man confidently, striding around Lilith and standing in front of her.
'All of you?' the tailor asked.
'All of us' Reuben nodded.
'We're closing soon actually' the tailor said.
'That's ok' Reuben said, waving the man away. 'Lilith has enough to pay for the trouble, don't you Lilith?' he spoke back to her.
She glared at him in annoyance, huffing impatiently. Lilith approached the tailor, walking around Reuben and slipping her hand into her pocket as she did so. She strode up to the counter, dumping a pile of coins onto the table, before reaching back into her pocket and scooping up another handful of coins, before dumping them on the table too.
She did this several times, until all her pockets were empty. Then she stepped back, and watched the tailor expectantly.
The tailor leant forwards towards the counter, eyes roving over the now large pile of coins. He didn't count them; it was clear at a glance that the amount was more than worth his trouble.
He straightened again, turning towards the strange group of five that had entered his shop, dressed only in white robes with bare feet. He smiled.
'It would be a pleasure to serve you' he said to them. 'I will fulfil your every desire.'
He hurried past them quickly towards the door, turning the sign over so that to passersby in the street outside it read, 'closed'.
He turned back to them.

‘Now’ he clapped his hands together. ‘What can I do for you?’
The four men all glanced at each other, Lilith did not react.
‘Well’ Aski said, placing his hands upon his hips. ‘What could we ask for?’
‘While you think about it’ the tailor said, ‘let me just summon my helpers.’
He rushed around the counter, scooping up the money as he went, and disappeared through an archway and out of sight. The others heard him calling in the next room.
‘Mandy! Sue! Will you come down here for a moment?’
The sound of footsteps could be heard coming down the stairs, and Mandy and Sue rounded the corner through the archway, coming into sight.
‘These gentlemen…and lady’ he added, nodding to Lilith, ‘need our help in finding some new clothes’ the tailor explained. ‘Can you help them?’
‘It would be our pleasure’ Mandy bowed politely.
‘After all’ Sue beamed happily, hands folded neatly before her, ‘this is our speciality.’

Lilith was taken to a different room from the men to be measured. The two women worked quickly, taking the sizes of each of the five and finding them clothes that fit, making some adjustments her and there to some of the clothing before proceeding.
Jaspin listened to the woman as she spoke to him, allowing himself to be measured, but never replied to her questions with words. Gael on the other hand was very vocal indeed, loud and more jovial than usual. Lilith could hear him in the next room. By the sound of their giggling, both women Gael was flirting with seemed to be quite taken with him.
The hour passed quickly, and when the woman were finished fitting Lilith, she gazed at the full length mirror that was presented before her.
The dress she wore now as a pretty blue, with black lining and a round neck. Lilith’s white hair rested over her shoulders as she observed herself without reaction.
‘Do you like it?’ one of the women asked uncertainly.
‘Its fine’ Lilith replied simply. ‘Thank you.’
She walked through the archway and back into the other room, passing the woman who held the curtain back for her.
She walked with her head down, but when she lifted her eyes and glanced the others, the sight took her breath away.
They were all dressed handsomely, in waistcoats, fine-cut trousers and smart black shoes. Aski wore only black, the red jewels he wore around his neck stood out clearly now, as did his light blue eyes. Reuben was dressed in maroon, sweeping his blonde hair back as he turned towards Lilith, giving her that wise look she was quickly becoming familiar with. Gael was wearing a fine fabric of light blue silk pattered in swirls, and Jaspin wore a cream colour, his steely grey eyes watching her silently, his pure silver hair fell like a curtain around his head.
‘You're beautiful’ Lilith whispered. And then she remembered herself, turning away suddenly and blushing.
Gael smiled, gliding towards her and drawing a slow breath as if about to speak.
He lifted his hand towards her, as if to brush her cheek. But suddenly Jaspin who was standing beside them grabbed his wrist, stopping him.
Gael stared at him uncertainly, before giving Jaspin a sheepish grin.

‘Look’ Reuben whispered to the others, ‘outside…’
The others glanced around.
‘The cheery blossoms are falling’ Aski voiced. ‘They look beautiful.’
‘It’s the start of the new year?’ Lilith breathed. ‘I…I didn’t know.’
The New Year, and the first day of summer, was marked by the falling cheery blossoms when their petal would fall. Lilith had not seen this spectacle when she lived in the city and town, as it was so build up, but this town was more open.
This was a time that from here on, life was to get better for everyone, until winter came around once more.
‘We should celebrate’ Aski continued, as the five of them trailed out of the shop to stand in the street, casting his hand out to catch the falling petals, some of them tickling his arm as they sailed by.
Behind him Reuben and Gael were smiling, even Jaspin couldn’t hold back a grin as he watched the world around them.
It’s all so beautiful Lilith gazed about in wonder, though keeping her expression neutral, *like them* she thoughts, glancing towards the four men.
She saw them in a different light now, returned to their former magnificence. No longer were they scruffy looking, filthy and starving. Like a polished jewel, they were now…now…
Beautiful…
‘We’ve been trapped in darkness for far too long’ Gael breathed. ‘I want to see everything.’
‘We will see everything’ Reuben gleamed. ‘But first, we must celebrate. It is the start of the New Year after all. There is sure to be a huge party in this town, like there will be in every town and city and village.’ He smirked. ‘The start of the New Year, this is when things get better for everyone.’
Gael shot a glance sideways at him. ‘Yeah’ he grinned slyly. ‘Let us be free once more, like we used to be.’

That evening as darkness fell, the lanterns hanging in the town shone even brighter. People flocked to the street, food was brought out, and the music and dancing began. By midnight, the fireworks were flashing in the sky, and the party was in full bloom.
Lilith however took no part of it. She sat on a bench, one of many that had been brought out and positioned on the edge of the town square. The benches were now laden with food that the people helped themselves to, taking handfuls of nibbles every so often, or sitting down to enjoy them while they talked in small groups. The town square was where most of the people were now, dancing and having a good time as the fireworks sang above them, being fired from the balconies of many of the houses all around them.
Lilith sat alone on the bench watching it all, not tempted by the food nearby, she instead stared into the throng of happy folk. From where she was she could see Gael, seated on a chair beside the podium where the musicians played. He leant back with a rose in his mouth. Sitting upon his lap was a woman with dark haired tied up, wearing a low-cut dress of vivid red. He held her waist tightly as she leant over him, kissing his neck and chest as he held the rose between his teeth, grinning hungrily at her. A short distance away at one of the benches on the edge of the square, Reuben was drinking with a group of young men, laughing loudly as they spoke over one another in raised voices. A short time later, a pretty young blonde

with a tight corset sailed over to him, grabbing him by the arm and whispering into his ear. Lilith saw him smirk. He rose to join her in a dance amongst the crowd.
Lilith shifted in her seat. She glanced to the figure beside her uncertainly. It was Jaspin. Like Lilith, he had chosen to take no part in the celebration, instead choosing to sit where he was. He watched, with an expression as if waiting for it to all be over.
Lilith turned away again, and looked back to the party.
She saw Aski was playing a duelling game in the crowd nearby, a dangerous looking game that Lilith didn't fully understand, one that involved throwing knives, drinking, and a lot of money bet. Only the bravest of men seemed to be taking part by the look of it Lilith noticed, as she watched she saw the players participating were more mature gentlemen, more sober and more controlled then the young ruffians that surrounded them.
Lilith heard a scream of delight then, and then a cheer. Her eyes drifted the other way again, and she saw Gael lifting the red dressed woman over his shoulder, carrying her to one of the public buildings nearby, and inn, and disappearing through the door.
She sighed, and glanced towards Jaspin sitting a short distance from her.
She tried to speak to him.
'You wish for no part in the celebration?'
He turned towards her, indicating that he had heard her speak, but turned away again, keeping his lips tight shut.
Perhaps he really is unable to speak Lilith thought bowing her head. *I wonder why he keeps his silence.*
Reuben came to them a short while later to see if they were both alright, cheeks flushed with the heat and alcohol.
Lilith told him she was fine. Jaspin answered only with a nod.
A short time after that, Lilith left the party altogether to be alone. She didn't tell the others where she was going, or even that she was going at all. She guessed them to be having too good a time to even notice she was gone, and she was right.
Only one noticed her leave; Jaspin, watching her with his steely grey eyes. He saw her slip through the crowd, hand slithering casually in and out of several pockets as she went. Then she was out of sight.

Lilith returned the next morning to the town square where many people still remained. It was much quieter than the night before, but several had spent the whole night out here, such a beautiful and peaceful and warm night, they had slept outside on the benches, some with only thin blankets and a few pillows to keep them comfortable.
She found Reuben and Aski out here; Jaspin and Gael were not to be seen. Reuben was lying on one of the tables amongst the food which was scattered around him, resting on his back with a cloth over his eyes. Aski was lying on the podium, face-down.
As Lilith watched him, she saw the musicians beginning to rise around him, some still clutching their instruments to them. Aski pushed himself up to a kneeling positing, gingerly getting to his feet. The instant he was standing fairly straight, he lost his balance, stumbling back and tumbling off the podium he crashed into one of the tables behind him, glasses and plates crashing to the ground. Reuben groaned at the noise, hand going to his face and pulling the cloth off him, rubbing his eyes groggily. He sat up, head in his hands. Then he looked up.

‘Lilith’ he said spotting her. ‘Good morning. You look well.’
‘You do not’ she replied.
They both glanced over towards Aski, who was kneeling with his hand over his mouth, trying not to be sick, and holding the table beside him for support.
‘You’ve lost control of yourselves I see’ Lilith noted.
‘We did…’ Reuben admitted, ‘go a little too overboard.’ He grinned at her. ‘But we had a good time…we had a *great* time.’
‘I hope it was worth is’ Lilith raised an eyebrow, as Reuben clutched his head.
A short time later, once he had gathered himself, Aski came over to join them.
‘Morning’ he grumbled wearily, ‘how are we both feeling?’
‘Acceptable’ Reuben answered.
‘And yourself?’ Aski spoke to Lilith. ‘Did you not drink at all last night?’
‘I did not’ Lilith admitted. ‘I found that I was not in the mood.’
‘Where are Jaspin and Gael?’ Reuben asked.
‘I don’t know’ Aski said. ‘But if we stay here I'm sure they will return.’
An hour or so later, and Jaspin came to them, about half an hour or so after that, and Gael appeared from one of the houses, looking livelier than all of them.
‘Good morning!’ he beamed at all of them. ‘What a fine morning it is.’
His eyes turned towards Lilith, who stared blankly back at him for a moment, before he looked away.
‘What are we going to do now?’ Gael asked.
‘I have an idea’ Reuben voiced, raising his head.
‘And what's that?’ Aski spoke.
‘Cake’ Reuben answered. ‘Let’s get a cake.’
Lilith’s eyes widened slightly, and she drew a gasp at this.
It was a tradition for many, the day after the New Years fireworks to buy an expensive cake as a token of celebration. The cakes that were produced were expensive and of beautiful designs and delicious tastes. They were in themselves masterpieces, and pieces of art.
The last time she had enjoyed a cake, was so many years ago, when she was living on the streets with Lily, the young girl who had felt like a sister to her. Tears prickled in her eyes then as she thought of Lily. It had been so many years, and she wondered what she was doing. Where was she now? Was she happy? Lily would have grown up quite a bit in the years that have passed; she would be mature now, beautiful no doubt.
‘This sort of thing is usually only shared between family’ Lilith objected, feeling suddenly uncertain.
‘And who’s to say we can’t share it amongst friends too’ Reuben smirked. ‘Come on; let’s go find ourselves a nice cake to share. Lilith, do you have enough money?’
She huffed at him then, reaching into her pocket sulkily and scooping out what was there and dumping it into his open hand. Amongst the coins were bracelets and jewels and one silver pocket watch.
‘Excellent’ Reuben said, sifting through the contents and picking out what he thought he wouldn’t need and handing it back to Lilith. ‘Jaspin, would you like to come with me and help choose one?’

Jaspin didn't answer; he only unfolded his arms and stepped forward to show he was ready to go.
'Excellent' Reuben said again, sliding off the table and straightening up, dusting himself off briefly from the crumbs and bits of food that were stuck to his clothes. 'Let's go.'

A short time later, and the two returned.
'Jaspin helped me chose it' Reuben explained as he unboxed the cake and placed it carefully on the bench before them. 'And I must say, he has very good taste.'
It was a modest sized, two-layer cake, decorated with beautiful and intricate designs of seashells and starfish and pretty swirls to represent the waves in the sea. The whole thing was beautifully painted in painstaking detail that must have taken hours and hours to complete.
'You chose well' Aski noted, gazing down at it. 'Who will do the honours?'
'Jaspin?' Reuben suggested.
Jaspin silently took the knife Reuben offered him, cutting into the cake with careful and delicate precision. He offered the others each a slice, giving the last one to Lilith.
'I…' Lilith hesitated. 'I don't know….'
'Just take it' Gael told her, already helping himself to a second slice. 'It's quite delicious.'
Lilith took the small plate hesitantly from Jaspin who watched her closely; she stared down at the slice. The cake itself was peach and plum sponge, light and beautifully made. The inside of the cake was as perfect as the outside.
Lilith took a small fork from the table beside her, cutting into it and taking a small corner. She popped it into her mouth, and the taste instantly exploded in her mouth.
She swallowed.
'It's delicious.'
Gael beamed at her. 'I knew you'd love it' he said.
Lilith remembered the last cake she had shared with Lily, in a time long past, in another life. The gesture of being offered one of these cakes, even by someone she barely knew was a touching gesture, and as she ate, she felt strange emotions swelling inside her.
When they had eaten their fill of cake, Lilith noticed suddenly a young child hanging around the edge of the square. A young boy, he was filthy, and skinny.
A vagrant Lilith realised, *I guess they are everywhere, in every town and city*…
She cut another slice of cake, a large piece; then hesitated, instead taking the entire rest of the cake, and wandering over towards the boy, who tensed at the sight of her approaching.
As she did so, the others watched her from behind, curious of her actions.
'Here' Lilith smiled kindly down at the boy, offering the plate with the cake for him to take. 'It's yours.'
The boy didn't move at first, perhaps suspecting a trick.
'It's ok' Lilith reassured. 'I used to be homeless once too.'
The boy looked her up and down then, taking in her decent clothes and clean appearance. Lilith could almost see the little cogs in his mind turning.
'Thank you' the boy whispered meekly, taking the cake from her.
'Just promise me' Lilith said, reaching into her pocket and handing the rest of its contents to the boy, the jewels and silver and the last of the coins she carried at that time, 'that you will share this with others who need it.'

Lilith glanced up then, seeing further down the street a small group of children huddle together, equally as dishevelled, though these ones were younger, they appeared to be waiting for the boy to return back to them.
'I will' the boy whispered back, holding the cake in one hand and slipping the precious gifts into his pocket with the other. 'Thank you…'
Lilith nodded to him, smiling widely. 'Make the most of it' she told him. 'Make it last.'
He gave a firm nod to her, turning and slipping away, he returned to the other children who waited a distance away, the children watched her in wonder for a few seconds, before disappearing around the corner and out of sight.
Lilith watched them go warmly, smiling in a way she had not done so in years.
'That was very kind of you' Aski said from behind her. He turned to face her. 'Why did you do it?'
'Because' Lilith answered simply, remembering Charlotte, and how she had offered her a home and a new life away from the cold hard streets. 'One day, someone did something good for me, and when *he* grows up' she said, looking down the street the boy had run down, 'he will do the same.'
Behind her, Jaspin had watched closely with narrowed eyes, frowning deep in thought.

Chapter Fifteen
Meadow

Aski lay on his back in the meadow, arms folded behind his head. He smiled up at the sun, reaching a hand up towards it, as if he wanted to touch it, to hold it in his hand.
'Today is a beautiful day' he sighed.
Around him, the others were. Jaspin resting on his side with his back to the others, Reuben sitting against a tree, Gael sitting cross legged, making a daisy chain, and Lilith, she lay beside Aski, staring up at the clouds.
'We should travel the world' Aski said.
Lilith turned to face him.
'What about your old lives?' she asked him. 'Don't any of you have homes to go to?'
'I thought we weren't going to talk about the past' Reuben said.
'I didn't mean…' Lilith began. 'It's just….'
'We could ask you the same thing' Reuben told her. 'Why do you stay with us, instead of going home?'
'I have no home' Lilith replied flatly.
'Neither do we.'
Lilith glanced towards him, before looking away.
'So what are you all going to do then?'
Gael glanced up from his daisy chain.
'What are we going to do?' he echoed. 'Live.'

‘That’s not an answer’ Lilith said blankly.
‘Well what are *you* going to?’ Gael counteracted.
This caught Lilith off guard somewhat. For the last few weeks she had been living with the group of four strangers, simply moving from one place to the next, with no real purpose, no real goal, and constantly stealing from others. It almost felt like back in the days when she was a child, travelling the world with her father, as he sought for a place to leave his daughter, to wash his hands of her.
‘I don’t know’ Lilith admitted. ‘I don’t know what I'm going to do.’
‘Stay with us’ Aski said. ‘Our kind should stick together. Who knows how many of us are left.’
‘It would be nice if we could find others of our kind’ Reuben said mournfully.
‘It would’ Aski said, rolling on his side to face the others. ‘But how would we find them? How would we even know where to look?’
‘Angels are normally drawn to each other, they sense each other, ’ Gael spoke up. ‘Don’t they.’
‘It’s true’ Aski spoke to the grass. ‘But…I feel nothing.’
Nearby, Jaspin rolled onto his back, staring up in silence at the sky.
‘What is your purpose?’ Lilith asked suddenly, furrowing her brows. ‘I feel I do not exist anymore.’
‘We only wish to move forwards, to live, to travel’ Reuben said.
Lilith took a shuddering breath. ‘To what end?’ she breathed.

Chapter Sixteen
Greed

The next town they came to was a dingy one; it was not at all pleasant. They decided not to stay here for very long, and so moved on, to the next town, then to a village, then to another town, and another after that. The last town they came to was a nice one, and so they decided to stay her for quite some time.
Several days passed, and still they remained. One afternoon found four of them lounging around a luxurious and large room, with tall windows, red velvet curtains, several four-poster beds and a roaring hearth. It was warm in this spacious room, and pleasant. But Lilith did not find it appealing in the slightest, if anything, she hated it. She hated the meaningless of it all, the boredom; the complete uncertainty of the days to come. The others however seemed far more content. Lilith as she sat upon the bed, leaning against the headboard holding her knees, glanced briefly over to them. Reuben lay on a wide leather sofa, his mouth upon a cigar and sucking in deeply. He exhaled slowly, blowing smoke into the air. Nearby Aski lay on his front, a pretty young woman running her hands up and down his bare back, rubbing oils into his skin. And Jaspin, still as silent as ever, sat away from the rest, upon the windowsill, gazing out at the streets beyond.

This had all of course been paid for at Lilith's expense, and she was constantly driven to steal for them. Their needs seemed to be growing with every passing day, and all the time they wanted more. Lilith found them more demanding than the host of children she had shared a house with; back so many years ago when she lived with William. The man she had nearly married.

She felt a twinge of sadness at then. It had been a very long time since she had remembered him, and she thought briefly where he was now. What was he doing? Was he happy?'

Lilith raised her head, rising from the bed and making her way to the door.

'Lilith?' Reuben spoke up, taking the cigar from his mouth. 'Where are you going?'

'I'm going out for a moment' she replied without a pause in her stride.

'Won't you stay with us?' he asked. 'It's so…peaceful here.'

'I'm bored' Lilith answered. 'I want something to do.'

'Do you want a massage?' Aski spoke up, turning his head to face her as he lay on his front, the woman behind him still working her hands. 'Oooo' he said. 'It feels so good.'

'No thank you' she told him. 'All I want is some fresh air.'

She left the large grey building, meeting the last figure on the steps outside the guesthouse. Gael was surrounded by several beautiful women, handsomely dressed with their low-cut necklines, hair tied up and jewels around their necks, wrists and hanging from their ears. All the women were fawning over Gael, they seemed to adore him. Lilith paused for a moment, thinking that she couldn't blame them for the way they acted. Gael was incredibly handsome, with a swift tongue, quick wit and a charming smile. There was a time she would have been charmed by a man like him, back in the day when she was like the woman that surrounded him. Now, she cared not.

'Hey Lilith!' he called to her as she strolled past. 'Leaving so soon?'

'Soon?' she turned to him. 'I've been here all day. It's ever so dull.'

'Well' Gael grinned slyly at her, placing an arm each around the women either side of him. 'It's about to get a lot more interesting.'

'I'm afraid' Lilith began, surveying the six evening women, 'there's not enough to go around.'

She marched off before he could say another word, moving quickly through the streets, heading in no particular direction. As she went, her hands slipped in and out of several pockets casually. The act to her had become as easy as taking a step forward, as natural as breathing. This she didn't like.

By the time she reached the end of the street, she had to move more slowly. Her pockets were full and chinked with every step she took. If she wasn't careful, she would likely soon be the next target to be pick pocketed by someone else.

She came to the town square, where there was a modest stage in the centre, around which a crowd had gathered. Lilith glanced either side of her, before turning her eyes upon the stage itself.

Upon the stage was a man dressed in bright colours of yellows and oranges and blues, wearing a strange sort of mask that covered his head. The mask was a bird mask, with a bright yellow beak. Only his mouth could be seen as he spoke, reciting the words he had no doubt spent many days rehearsing. As he spoke, several figures appeared behind him, moving to surround him. They twirled and danced around him, great strips of cloth tied to their wrists

as they weaved around the man in the centre of the stage. After a few moments, one of the women grabbed him around the waist, pulling his attention from the crowd onto her. He smiled beneath his beak, bowing and taking the ladies hand.
'My little canary' the man said, 'may I have this dance?'
Her attention began to drift downwards, to the man in front of her. He was an older figure, judging by his lack of hair, and was wealthy, judging by his girth. As far as Lilith could see as she stood behind him, he dressed in handsome blacks. The man however hadn't seemed to accept that they didn't fit him as well as they used to.
Lilith let out a breath, her expression bored as her attention drifted back towards the dancers on the stage. She moved closer to the man, raising her hand towards his pocket.
Before she could slip into his pocket, a hand lashed out, grabbing her around the wrist. Lilith whirled around, meeting the eyes of the man that held her, one of the town's watchmen.
He glared at her through bushy eyebrows, his moustache curled up in a snarl.
'Caught you' he said.

A short time later, and Lilith was shoved forwards, the cell door closed after her. She turned around to face the watchman.
'Your thieving days are over miss' he told her, as Lilith watched him with blank eyes. 'You might even be hung for this.'
Lilith didn't reply. She didn't respond in any way for that matter.
The watchman frowned at her, tossing the bag of coins up in the air and catching it before tossing it up again. He stopped suddenly, considering her.
'It's strange that such a pretty lady like you would reduce yourself to steal so much.'
Lilith watched him as he walked away, his echoing footsteps receding down the stone corridor.
Her pockets had all been turned out. Everything she had stolen that day had been taken away from her, and she felt lighter for it.
Her cell was bare and small. There was one modest bed in the corner, and a barred window set high in the wall. She stepped over to it, reaching a hand up to hold one of the bars as she peered outside, standing on her tip toes to see.
Outside she saw the gallows, the ropes hanging swinging in the breeze.
Lilith let go of the bars, and turned away from the window.
She moved over to the bed and lay down, feeling instantly at ease.
Lilith closed her eyes and breathed a heavy sigh, arms folded behind her head as she gave herself to sleep.

Outside the prison, Gael had watched Lilith being led, had seen her face peer through the barred window in her cell.
He stepped back from the tall double-gates, gazing across the courtyard where the gallows waited for their next victim to give themselves up to them.
He turn-tailed and ran, heading back to the guesthouse and bursting through the door, stumbling into the room where the others waited. Aski, Reuben and Jaspin all glanced up in alarm at his sudden appearance.

They watched him silently as he doubled over, resting with his hands on his knees and gasping for air.
'Gael' Reuben said at last. 'What on earth is the matter?'
Gael drew another gasp of air, before straightening again.
'Lilith's been arrested!' he blurted.
Reuben, Aski and Jaspin all tensed. Jaspin's eyes flashed at Gael's words.

Back in the prison in her cell, Lilith lay on her bed comfortably, dozing peacefully.
Hours later, she opened her eyes, when she heard the sound of a door opening somewhere further down the corridor.
Lilith sat up quickly, pulling out the lace at the back of her dress that held her corset tight, and using it to tie her hair up. Just before the watchman came into view, she rose to her feet, slipping her dress lower so that her shoulders were exposed.
She moved closer to the bars, halting the watchman in his tracks as he made to simply pass bye.
She stared at him deeply, standing with a hand on her hip, the other limp at her side.
The watchman hesitated, unable to turn away from her.
A slow smile crossed Lilith's face, knowing already she had the man beneath her grasp.
The watchman reached forward, slipping the key into the lock and turning.
The door swung open.
An hour or so later, Lilith returned on her own to the guesthouse. When she walked through the door to their room, her appearance was a surprise to all.
'Oh' Aski said curiously. 'We were just talking about you.'
'How did you get out?' Reuben asked suspiciously.
'They made a mistake' Lilith replied plainly strolling in. 'They believe that a woman is simply not capable of stealing in such a way.' She hesitated then, seeing the large paper upon the table that the others were sat around. It was a crude sketch of the prison she had just left.
Lilith moved closer to it, craning forwards.
She realised with a smirk that they had been planning to break her out. Their ideas seemed to range from using explosives, to impersonating a guard, to getting themselves arrested and somehow breaking her out from the inside.
Each one of their ideas was as foolish as the last, and none had at least a reasonable chance of working, even in the most favourable of circumstances.
Lilith straightened.
'Foolish.'
She turned and strode away.
The others watched her go in silence.
It was night time outside, and everything was still. For the longest moment, none of them moved; then Jaspin rose to his feet, following after her.

He found her outside, running to catch up with her. Hearing footsteps behind her in the silent night, Lilith turned.
'Oh' she said in surprise. 'It's you.'
She faced him properly now.

‘What are you doing here?’ she asked him. ‘What do you want?’
He didn’t speak. He never spoke. Always as ever, he was silent.
‘Is it…’ she began, ‘that you do not want me to leave?’
He didn’t answer; he just stared at her, never breaking eye contact.
‘I'm sorry’ Lilith whispered, turning her back on him again.
Just like years ago when she left the house of pleasure without a second thought, she walked away, moving forwards, seeking a new beginning, seeking a new start.
‘I'm sorry’ Lilith said to Jaspin. ‘You won’t see me again.’
Lilith separated from them, wondering in her heart, what Jaspin was thinking.
Why did he come out to see her?
Why does he not speak?

Chapter Seventeen
The Golden Country

Lilith left those lands, and travelled far away, heading to a new country. She boarded a ship and sailed across the waters to a rich and prosperous nation.
This was the destination of many hundreds of people. War in the north had driven thousands of people to travel to this place known as the golden country, and they flocked outside the gates of the city. As Lilith walked the path, the main road which led to the great city, she saw hundreds of people sitting on the banks that overlooked the road. Foreigners, many who had travelled on foot for hundreds of miles to be here, in search of a better life now waited outside the city gates, many dying in the process, mainly the very young and old.
The city they sought to enter was already full, and it would be very difficult for any to enter who did not already live there. As Lilith took her place on the floor beside a starving family, she watched as men and women already living in the city, walked back and forth along the road. Some gave the vagrants looks of sadness, others of disgust.
Lilith glanced to the family beside her. This race of people lived in a cold climate, a far off and hostile place where it always snowed, even in summer, and they lived in darkness for six months of the year. Their skin was pale, near pure white, and their hair was either pure white like Lilith’s, or white-blonde.
Lilith’s grandmother was of this race; that is why her hair was white like theirs.
It was a hard land to live in, their homeland, now wracked with war, it had become unliveable. It was no wonder they travelled all this way, risking death by starvation, drowning or disease. Their life back home was so horrible, many still tried to come here.
One of the men noticed her attention as Lilith watched them, and he spoke to.
‘Are you looking for a home too?’
He was extremely skinny, his face gaunt, his eyes distant.
‘Yes’ Lilith answered him meekly. ‘I am.’
It was many months that Lilith lived beside the road, spending every waking moment trying to find food and only just surviving starvation herself. She eventually was seen by one of the officials, who were organising the thousands of foreigners trying to enter their kingdom.

Only few were accepted into the city. One had to speak the language, have certain skills and knowledge and pass several tests before even being considered. Some of these tests were physical, others were written. Though Lilith lacked the qualifications on paper, when sitting the tests, she passed with flying colours. But even so, she was not accepted.
Many more months passed, and she passed every test that was thrown at her, the same ones over and over again, and still she was rejected. She was missing a crucial document, one that had been lost for years now.
Lilith thought back to her younger days, when she was just seventeen years old, in her very last day of school, the day after the New Year.
The day after the New Year celebration, was the day that many took their first steps forward as mature adults, and chose what goals they wished to pursue in life, which path they wanted to take. Each in their final year would go to school for the last time, and be placed in a category. They were pigeon holed, and forced to live up to specific expectations.
But the document, a piece of car with rounded corners, the document of their highest achievements accomplished since the time they were able to speak, the one that was supposed to follow them for the rest of their lives, Lilith had destroyed. Without it, it was almost impossible to receive further education or decent employment. In the upper class, it was absolutely impossible, even marriage was beyond reach without this document.
But Lilith had torn it in half, in front of all the students and teachers, refusing to be categorised.
'It doesn't matter' Lilith glowered, hugging her knees and shivering against the cold as she sat beside the road. 'I don't need it. I can succeed without it.'
Many more months passed, and Lilith, was at last accepted.
Despite the thousands of people still waiting outside the city, she was the only foreigner so far to be allowed through its gates. She was the first foreigner, granted permission to live here.
'Thanks to you father' she spoke reluctantly to herself, as the gates were opened for her to enter. 'This is all thanks to you, and the vast knowledge I gained in my early years travelling with you, as you tried to sell me…this is all thanks to you.'
She raised her head high, and took her first steps into the golden country, flanked by two officials dressed in red, as they led her to the office of immigration.
The first thing she did when she left the office, doing so alone and free from the officials that had questioned her mercilessly, and swarmed around her for hours, was visit a hospital. She was weak from hunger, and the long months living outside beneath the open sky beside that road had made her gravely ill. But she recovered, and months later, she was thriving.

Chapter Eighteen
Walter

Yet again in her life, Lilith had made a new start. She now worked in a pleasure house, not like the one she did before, this one was of a different sort. The men and women the customers came here to see were entertainers, walking pieces of art. Only the most handsome and beautiful were hired to work here, they were dancers, singers and musically gifted. They

learnt these skills from a very young age. They were given the most beautiful clothes Lilith had ever seen, and their makeup was exaggerated, but no less beautiful. Unlike the pleasure house Lilith once worked in, these people were not allowed to be touched, like art, they were admired only from a distance. They were protected. Amongst the servants who served the guests, tall and burly men, finely dressed, clung to the walls, hanging around the columns and beside the doors. Their presence alone was enough to deter any unwanted activity, and the guests always behaved themselves.
The entertainers were never touched.
Being too old to work as an entertainer, Lilith had been accepted as a servant instead. That in itself was hard enough to secure. Having no paperwork, Lilith had to produce a very large deposit before being accepted here, but now she had work, she even owned her own home, though it was tiny, it was comfortable, and it was *hers*.

One evening, during a shift, Lilith noticed a man watching her, an older gentleman who must have been in his seventies, though still fit and healthy.
He was surrounded by other gentleman about his age, all sitting upon luxurious velvet sofas around a low table. They were playing some sort of card game, as a beautiful female dancer danced nearby. Her face was painted white, which made her red lips and black-lined eyes stand out more. She was utterly captivating as she moved, and all the gentleman's attention was turned towards her, except one.
Lilith moved over to him, thinking that he might want something.
'Can I get you some refreshments sir?' Lilith asked politely, holding the round silver tray in her hands before her.
'It's not refreshments I want' the gentleman replied, speaking in a quiet voice so that the other gentlemen around him could not hear, 'it's you.'

After her shift ended, Lilith waited for him outside the establishment. She turned to face him as he came up behind her.
He was considerably taller than she was, with grey hair slicked back and a handsome smile.
He offered her his arm and she took it, walking with her through the streets and to his home.
A short while later; and Lilith was wandering through the many rooms of his large manor home.
'You live alone in this big house?' she asked him.
'Not alone no.' He came to stand beside her. 'I have a young boy living with me, only twelve. I adopted him some years ago after my wife…' he broke off. 'His name is Ben' he finished.
'What about your wife?' Lilith asked turning to him.
'She died' the gentleman replied sadly. 'She always wanted children, but could have none of her own.'
'How did she die?'
'There are a few servants who live here also' the gentleman continued, 'so I am not alone.'
Lilith raised her head to him, noticing the way he had avoided the question.
'So' the gentleman replied. 'What do you think?'
'I don't even know your name' she told him.
'I'm sorry' he bowed to her, placing a hand upon his chest. 'How rude of me. It's Walter.'

‘I'm Lilith.’
‘Such a beautiful name. And unusual.’
‘Are you sure about this?’ Lilith asked him. ‘It’s such a strange thing to ask of someone.’
‘Strange’ Walter nodded, ‘but necessary. I am well known in this city, and it is expected of me to make an effort not to die alone.’
Lilith turned away from him, taking in the beautiful rooms, the roaring fireplace, the large portraits of the families that lived in this comfortable manor in days gone by. The many ornaments, stuffed birds in glass jars, finely crafted cabinets, a ticking grandfather clock; the thick and lush carpets, the wide stairs leading to the floor above, the large chandeliers hanging from the ceiling.
‘So?’ Walter asked expectantly. ‘What do you think?’
‘Alright’ Lilith replied. ‘I’ll do it.’ She turned fully to him, facing him head on now. ‘I just want to ask you one thing.’
‘Anything.’
‘Why me?’
‘Because you looked so sad’ Walter replied, giving her a mournful expression. ‘You stood out to me more than anyone else.’

Later that very same day, after selling her tiny home, Lilith stood on the steps of the alter saying her vows.
She never thought she would be married after William had rejected her all those years ago, and never thought it would be like this.
The gathering was only small, with just a handful of people.
That evening, Lilith returned to the manor that was now her home. Walter led her to a bedroom, and Lilith faced the bed, taking off her white gloves and standing with her back to him.
She slipped the white dress off her shoulders, speaking to him.
‘I suppose…you want to….’
But she felt a hand suddenly on her shoulder. Walter’s touch was gentle. She breathed a slow gasp of surprise as he pulled the dress back up to cover her shoulder.
‘I have no interest in anything physical’ he told her calmly. ‘I won’t ever love you. Not like that. This is all for appearance you understand.’
Lilith turned to him in shock, watching with curiosity and confusion and he walked away from her, pausing at the door.
‘This is your bedroom’ he told her, smiling kindly at her with his hand on the door frame. ‘Everything in this room is yours.’ He smiled at her again. ‘Sleep well.’
He closed the door after him, and Lilith stood there in silence, in the middle of the room staring.
After a time she moved over to the wardrobe, seeing a few clothes that were roughly her size. She took off her wedding dress and put on a nightdress.
She lay on the bed, feeling strange. Not because of the strange situation that had happened to her so suddenly, but because of the way Walter had acted.
I have no interest in anything physical. I won’t ever love you. Not like that.
She slept peacefully that night, waking with the sun hours later.

That morning, her first day ever as a wife in her new home began. She sat down for breakfast with her husband, the servants served her food, and she met Ben for the very first time.
'Hello' the young boy smiled up at her. 'Father says you're going to be living with us now. My name is Ben. It's nice to meet you.'

Months passed, and Lilith was becoming accustomed to her new life. Even the strangeness of it was beginning to wear off.
And in the months that passed, Lilith found in her heart that she was developing feelings for Walter. The strange thing was, it was *because* Walter didn't want to touch her, that she came to love him.
'I know that makes no sense' Lilith grumble to herself, flicking through the pages of the book.
'Are you alright?' Ben asked her, who sat nearby in the lounge. 'You always flick through books like that when something's bothering you.'
Lilith put the book down. The boy she had found was a smart one, and even though she had spent only a short amount of time in this house as the wife, he had come to know her very well. He had grown very fond of her, and had watched her closely over the months.
And she in turn, had grown fond of him.
Lilith pushed the book away from her, sitting back in her chair.
'Come here' she spoke softly to Ben, opening her arms out.
Ben slid off the sofa, padding over to Lilith and clambering onto her lap.
Lilith wrapped her arms around him, holding the shawl around the both of them. She breathed a heavy sigh.
'I like these days' Ben mumbled, resting his cheek again Lilith's arm. 'These are the best days.'
'They certainly are' Lilith squeezed him tight, before relaxing again.
'I'll have to go to school soon' Ben said forlorn. 'Father says so.'
'Father would be right.'
'Why do I have to go to school?' Ben asked resentfully. 'I'm happy here at home with my books.'
'You have to go out and socialise with other children your own age' Lilith explained to him. 'You need an education if you want a future.'
'But your education didn't help your future' Ben interrogated. He glanced up at Lilith knowingly. 'Did it.'
Lilith stared down at him, before her expression broke into a smiled.
'Has anyone ever told you, you're too smart for your own good?'
'Yes' Ben gleamed. 'I have been told that before. And for the record, I am going to hold off going to school, for as long as I can. You will have to drag me there kicking and screaming.'
'Yes' Lilith said. 'I felt the same way too.' She closed her eyes. 'Have you decided what you want to do when you grow up?'
'I want to move away from the city' the boy replied. 'I want a simple life. I want to live off the land, and be happy.' He squeezed her arm tight. 'I want to grow my crop, and harvest it every year. I want to rear my own animals, go out in the wood and hunt my own food.'

‘You're a country boy at heart.’
‘I want to grow up to be a country man.’ Ben looked up at her. ‘I love the city, I really do; it’s where I was born. But I long for the wildness and it’s the open lands.’
‘Well, Martin should be here soon. He will take you out to the woods; it’s a perfect day for it.’
‘I love it when Martin comes’ Ben gleamed.
‘I know.’
An hour or so later, there was a knock at the door.
Lilith was just stepping into the entrance hall as one of the servants was opening the front door.
‘Martin’ Lilith greeted. ‘It’s good to see you.’
‘Good morning’ the young man smiled.
Lilith took in his appearance. He was dressed in basic travelling clothes coloured mottled greens and earthy brown colours, with a hooded cloak resting across his shoulders, and a quiver of arrows at his back. He wore knee-high boots, aged and caked in mud, within his cloak; Lilith saw a collection of knives.
‘Is Ben ready to go?’
‘He sure is’ Lilith replied. ‘He’s been waiting for you.’
Lilith called the boy from upstairs and he came running as fast as he could, sliding to a stop beside Lilith on the smooth wooden floors.
‘Be careful won’t you’ Lilith told him.
‘I will’ Ben nodded eagerly. He padded towards Martin, grinning up at him as Martin nodded down at to him. ‘Hello Martin, it’s good to see you.’
He followed the young man out into the streets, where two horses waited, one for Martin, one for Ben.
Ben clambered up onto his smaller horse, as Martin mounted his.
Lilith stood in the open doorway and waved them away, as they wheeled their horses around, tails flicking as they trotted down the street.
She closed the tall black door, shutting out the noise of the outside world, the murmur of the crowd, the clatter of horse’s hooves and the grinding of the carriage wheels on the cobbled streets.
Through the closed door, Lilith could still hear a bell ringing in the distance, its sound muffled through the wood.
‘He is a happy child’ came a voice from behind her. ‘Is he not?’
Lilith stepped back from the door; she turned to face her husband.
‘Yes Walter’ she told him. ‘He is.’

A short time later she put on her boots and took her coat, heading to the door.
‘Are you going out?’ Walter asked her.
Lilith paused at the door, hesitating. It would normally be at this point that a normal married couple; would normally embrace each other, perhaps smile; perhaps share a kiss.
‘I’m just going to the shops’ she told him quietly. ‘I will be back in a few hours.’
‘Ok’ Walter nodded, tucking his newspaper under his arm. ‘I will see you when you get back.’

He walked away from her.
Lilith hung back, lingering in the doorway as she watched him go.
He walked away from her, without a backwards glance.
Lilith felt a sinking in her heart, trying to ignore the feeling as she turned to face the outside world.
Lilith closed the tall black door behind her, stepping down and into the streets, her short heels clicking on the cobbles as she made her way.
She hadn't walked for more than a few minutes, when she heard a commotion in the streets.
Lilith slowed to a stop. She turned her head slowly towards the raised voice.
She saw a man confronting a family who were all huddled together. A crowd of people formed a circle around them.
Lilith listened to what the man was saying.
'Go home' he ordered, 'and stay there where you belong.'
In the months that passed, the migrant crisis had worsened, as thousands more 'pale' folk travelled from their homeland to be here, camping outside the city. After a time, the leaders who ran the city had been forced to open their gates to at least some of them.
This had caused tension for those already living within the city. As far as the residents were concerned, the foreigners were pests, who were taking their homes, eating their food, taking their jobs, and crowding the city. Their perfect and easy life in the golden lands was being dampened, thanks to the immigrants.
'There is no place for you here' the man was shouting at the family. 'Nobody wants you.'
Lilith turned on her heel and marched over towards him.
'What is the meaning of this?' Lilith demanded of him.
The man rounded on her, seeing Lilith's light skin and white hair, his expression grew ever more sour.
'Another foreigner' he scowled. 'Filth' he spat. 'You have no place living in this city. Crawl back to your icy caves in the north where you belong.'
'This is where I belong' Lilith told him. 'I was born on these soils. My father is a lord, my mother is a lady, and I was raised with the best education in the best school. If anyone has a place here' she narrowed her eyes, 'it's me.'
'You're a foreigner' the man growled persistently.
'Everyone is a foreigner' Lilith replied curtly, 'if you search far enough back in the family tree.'
'I was born in this city' the man said, 'I belong here.' He indicated family of five nearby, their skin pale; their hair light. 'You were not born in this city. You do not belong here. You're as bad as these albino freaks.'
Lilith's eye twitched.
She balled her fist and punched him hard in the face.
Caught by surprise the man fell back. Lilith ignored the gasps simultaneously from the crowd around her. She stood over the man, rubbing her first firmly.
The man rose to his feet swiftly, advancing onto her, their faces inches apart. He snarled as blood ran from his nose, but Lilith did not falter, but was as calm and indifferent as she always was.

‘These people are human beings’ she told him quietly. ‘You should be grateful you were born here, and not in *their* homeland which is ravaged by war.’ She narrowed her eyes. ‘*You* could be in their position’ she told him, ‘you might yet be in the future. And wouldn’t you want people to help you if you were in need?’
But Lilith knew her words were falling on deaf ears. The man was still angry, he wanted to strike her; she saw this. But he dared not, not in front of a crowd of people. It was bad that she had hit him, but it would be far worse if he hit her back.
‘My husband is a rich man’ Lilith told him, ‘with influence. Don’t do anything you’ll regret, for your own sake.’
The man stormed off furiously, pushing his way through the crowd and disappearing.
Lilith turned then to the family behind her.
‘Are you alright?’ she asked them.
They didn’t answer, only stared back at her. Lilith could see they were still shaken.
Lilith spoke to the crowd around them, speaking loudly.
‘Those of you who would persecute these people are no better than the terrorists that drive them from their home. Life is hard enough without us causing harm to each other, and we to help those in need. Yes we have limited space, but we live life well in this city. We will only suffer minor inconveniences, for a benefit that to these people’ she indicated the family, ‘is vast. Yes it will be harder to find jobs, harder to provide food and homes, but we all share this world together, and if we cannot rely on each other, then who *can* we trust?’ she listened to the ringing silence as the people around her watched in silence. ‘Remember’ Lilith spoke, ‘remember……*you* might be in their position one day.’
She offered her hand then to the family. There were two parents, a young boy and a young girl below the age of ten, and an older boy in his late teens.
‘Come with me’ Lilith said to them. ‘My husband will offer you a place to live in our home, our home is large; there is enough space for all of you.’
‘Thank you’ the father said, with tears in his eyes. ‘Thank you…’
‘Where are your belongings?’
‘The only thing we have’ the father replied, ‘are the clothes that we wear.’
‘Come with me’ Lilith said to them. ‘I’ll take you home.’

In the weeks that followed, the streets were becoming more and more crowded with the pale men and women and children that had travelled from the north, and many people, like Lilith had done, were opening their homes to them. The new family had lived with Lilith and her husband since that day they had first been found. Walter was not at first happy with their presence in his home, but over the days that had passed, he had come to terms with it. The pale family were quiet and kept to themselves, and Lilith would often go out with them into the city, helping them to find work so that they could fend for themselves. It had been hard, but the father at least had found a job, but it was not enough for them to be independent, and so for the meantime the family continued to stay with Lilith in the home.

One day, Lilith was walking through the streets of the city alone. It was on this day, in a one in a million chance, that she met a person she had not seen since she was a child.

She slowed to a stop, turning to face him as he walked by her.
'….Father?'
Ken stopped in his tracks, turning back to her with a stony expression, which turned gradually into surprise.
'Lilith?' His voice was distant. 'Is that really you?'
The woman by his side that held his arm stared at Lilith hard. Lilith glanced at her before speaking.
'Is that you mother?'
Lilith had never seen her mother before, not once in her life.
Beatrice stared at Lilith for a few seconds, before her expression turned angry.
'Freak' she spat.
Lilith had heard this word directed at her many times before, but this time, it hurt even more, because it came from *her*.
'What are you doing here?' Ken asked her, with no emotion in his voice.
'Can't you even pretend to be happy to see me father?' Lilith asked him sadly.
'I do not have it in me' he replied.
'I'm glad at least to see you well.'
'Why?' Ken asked.
'Because you are my father' Lilith said to Ken, 'and you are my mother' she said to Beatrice.
'You are not my daughter' Beatrice snarled.
'Yes' Lilith whispered, taking a step towards her. 'I am your daughter.'
'You are dead to me.'
'No matter how much you hate me' Lilith told her mother, 'I will always care for you, because of who you are.' She glanced towards her father, 'both of you.'
'You are not my daughter' Beatrice told her heartlessly again. 'I have no daughter.'
'I will always be your daughter' Lilith told her, stopping before them, 'no matter how much you wish otherwise. I will always love both of you, no matter how much you hate me, because you are my parents.'
She lifted her arms slowly, embracing the both of them.
'I'm so glad to see you again father' Lilith whispered. 'And I'm glad to at last have met you mother' she said. 'After all this time.'

A short time later, the three of them sat around a small round table in a coffee shop.
'What are you doing here?' Lilith asked her parents quietly.
Beatrice glared at her, grinding her teeth, before angrily turning away.
Ken glanced towards his wife, before answering for her.
'We are here to find Beatrice's mother' Ken explained. 'She is one of the pale ones' he said, referring to the nickname given to the foreigners in the north. 'We came here because we knew this was the best place to look for her.'
'My grandmother?' Lilith blinked. 'I've never met her before.' It was from her grandmother, her mother's mother, from whom she had inherited her pure white hair. 'I would be very excited to see her.' She raised her head. 'Do you believe she is alive?'
'We hope so' Ken replied.

Lilith had returned home late that evening. She had spoken with her parents for quite some time; even her mother exchanged at least a few words with her. Lilith had learnt that they were renting a house nearby, where they were going to stay until they found Beatrice's mother. And after some careful wording and the correct timing, Lilith managed to convince the both of them to tell her where they lived, so that she might see them again. Ken agreed to allow her visit them, but she would have a wait a few weeks, for them to come to term with this. Especially her mother. But Lilith left them happy, and when she returned home, she was in a good mood.

'Good afternoon' the servant said to Lilith as she stepped through the door. 'Did you have a pleasant outing?'

'I did' Lilith nodded her head. 'Thank you.'

The servant bowed, moving away. Lilith was left alone in the entrance hall. She stepped lightly across the wooden floor towards the dresser, picking up a bundle of letters and leafing through it.

There was several to her husband, a few to Ben regarding which school he would be going to, and one to her, from a distant friend who had lived on the other side of the city, before she moved away to travel.

Lilith opened the letter with a sigh, pulling the slip of paper out and beginning to read.

It was quiet in the hall, the sun shone through the tall windows either side of the front door, lighting the hall inside in a golden glow. Dust could be seen floating in the rays of light through the window, tiny particles sailing through the air and around the room.

It was silent in the hall, Lilith realised as she continued to read the letter. Walter and Ben must both be out she thought, and the servants only emerged from their hiding places if one of them returned home, or rang a bell for their attention.

Lilith was about to put the letter down, when the front door suddenly burst open.

Lilith started, wheeling around in shock, the letters slipping from her grasp. Who she saw standing in the doorway, gave her a second shock.

'Gael?!'

He stood there in the doorway dramatically, the light shining behind him as he grasped the doorframe either side, panting heavily.

'Lilith' he gasped. 'It's you!'

He exhaled deeply, straightening and running his fingers through his shaggy white blonde hair, flicking back the three long plates that grew on one side. His skin was tanned and his eyes a misty blue. He dressed in handsome black clothes, much like the ones he was wearing when she had first met him, only not faded and worn, but new and clean.

'I'm so glad we finally found you. We've been searing for *months*! From the very first moment you left us.'

He sauntered over to her, grinning widely.

'I've been longing to see you again' Gael told her, at his words Lilith's eyes instantly glazed over, and she adopted an expression of boredom.

He reached his hand out to touch her, to caress her cheek, but suddenly, someone caught his wrist.

Gael glanced over at Jaspin wide eyed, who still held Gael's wrist in his grasp.

Lilith watched him.
He was still as handsome as ever, and in the prime of his life. Within the gentle gaze of his steely eyes, Lilith could still see the swell of grief.
'Gael!' came another voice from the door, declaring his arrival. 'Stop harassing her! We didn't come all this way to scare her off again.'
It was Reuben. He was just as Lilith remembered him, a wise looking figure with a strong build, a chiselled jaw and high cheekbones. His blonde hair swept back, and he looked evermore powerful as he strode through the door.
Behind him came Aski, tall with long black hair and light blue eyes. His skin was pale and his frame was slender. Around his neck, he wore a shining red stone that glistened in the sunlight.
'Let him go Jaspin' Aski sighed.
Jaspin released Gael's wrist, and Gael stalked away.
Lilith turned to Jaspin to thank him, but halfway through her sentence, he walked away.
'I'm sorry' Aski said to him, waving his hands in a submissive gesture at her. 'He's just upset you left us.'
'He's upset?' Lilith repeated in surprise.
'You mean a lot to him' Aski explained to her, 'to all of us. We were very sad to see you go.'
'Nice place this' Reuben declared, striding into the hall and taking in their surroundings. 'It's big. Do you live here?'
'Yes' Lilith answered shortly.
'How?' Reuben asked her. 'Last time we met, you were a vagrant, just like the rest of us.'
'I married well.'
'You're married?' Aski said incredulous. 'That was quick.'
'It was a thing of necessity' Lilith explained. 'This is an arrangement that benefits the both of us.'
'So you don't love him?'
'That is not your business' Lilith said to Aski.
'Anyway' Reuben said to Lilith, 'it's a good thing we found you.'
'Why?'
'Because' he said, 'it will take all of us to find the earth maiden.'
'The earth maiden?' Lilith vaguely remembered one of them mentioning this before she left them. 'What is that?'
'Who' Reuben corrected, 'who is that?'
Lilith stared at him.
'She…' he began, 'is….' He fell silent in thought. 'Very dear to all of us' he finished. 'Even you.'
'But I've never met her.'
'It doesn't matter' Reuben shook his head. 'Our kind has a strong bond with her; we feel a natural connection, even if we've never met her before. But we will speak of her later.'
Lilith waited expectantly for them to continue, to speak, to do *something*. When they did nothing, she let out a heavy sigh.
'I suppose you want to sit down' she offered, 'and have some tea or something.'
'That would be lovely' Aski beamed joyfully, clapping his hands in approval.

A short time later, and the five of them sat around a round table in the tea room.
‘A tea room’ Aski was saying aloud as he eyes roved around them, ‘a room, just for drinking tea…’
Gael watched the servant hungrily as she served each of them one at a time. She glanced his way several times, cheeks blushing as she noticed his attention on her.
She finished serving them and hurried away quickly, clutching the tray to her as she went.
‘It’s big’ Reuben said, ‘this place.’
‘Yes you’ve said that once’ Lilith replied shortly.
‘You know you haven’t changed’ Gael gleamed at her, resting on his elbows as he leant towards her.
Lilith regarded them; Jaspin as always was utterly silent. She opened her mouth as if to begin pleasantries, but simply began with…
‘What do you want?’
Her tea, hot and steaming before her she had not touched.
‘Now is that any way to greet us after all this time?’ Reuben said to her, ‘you wound me.’
‘We searched for you for months Lilith’ Aski said to her.
‘I have a life here now’ she told them. ‘There is no need for you all to be here.’
‘But there is’ Reuben said. ‘Oh by the way, where is your husband?’
‘I don’t know’ Lilith said. ‘He goes out a lot.’
‘You don’t know where he is?’ Gael scoffed.
‘I don’t have a tracker on him’ Lilith turned to him scowling.
They fell silent suddenly, hearing movement nearby and looking up to see a young boy standing in the doorway. Ben, seeing that he had been noticed, slipped back around the corner and out of sight.
Gael smirked.
‘Is he yours?’ he asked Lilith.
‘Don’t be stupid’ Lilith said pushing her tea away. ‘Now unless you have something meaningful to say I see no need in continuing here.’
‘I don’t understand’ Reuben said.
Lilith placed her hands upon the table, pushing her chair back as she rose to stand.
‘I'm saying’ she began, ‘get out.’
‘Lilith’ Aski spoke up as she made to walk away. ‘We angels should stick together.’
She turned back to them. ‘Don’t use that word.’
‘What word?’
‘You know.’
Aski rose to his feet. ‘Don’t tell me you're ashamed of what you are.’
‘Being what I am has brought me so much pain and misery in my life’ Lilith said mournfully. ‘It’s the reason I was rejected by my parents in the first place.’
Aski moved over to her, taking her hands in his in an act that surprised her, he had never touched her so tenderly before.
‘Lilith’ Aski spoke in a gentle voice. ‘You can’t help being born what you are. If there are those who would reject you for it, then they are the ones in the wrong.’

Lilith gazed into his eyes, and could see that he was genuine. Even so, she didn't want to hear it. She didn't want to be comforted.
'I think you should leave.'
'Why?'
'There is no place for you here.' She spoke to Aski, but she addressed all of them. 'And I don't want you here.'
Aski let go of her. Lilith could see by his demeanour that he was genuinely hurt.
'Do you really mean that?' he asked.
At that moment, Lilith heard the front door open. Marching footsteps came their way; then her husband appeared in the doorway.
Walter faltered, clearly not expecting to see so many strangers in his home.
'Who are these gentlemen?' he asked his wife.
'I…' Lilith began. And then she realised that she didn't know what to say. 'They are travellers' she finished. 'I met them some time ago before I….before I came to this city.'
'Oh' Walter said. 'It's nice to meet you.'
'It's alright' Lilith said hastily when she realised that the others didn't know what to make of him. 'They were just leaving.'

'We have to be patient with her' Reuben said sometime later, after Lilith had eagerly shown them out. 'She's probably settle here. No wonder she doesn't want to leave.'
'Was that her husband we saw?' Aski asked.
'Must have been' Reuben shrugged carelessly.
'He was a bit old wasn't he?' Aski said.
'Lilith said that arrangement was a thing of necessity' Gael mused aloud. 'She said that it was a thing that benefited both of them.'
'What do you think she meant by that?' Reuben asked.
'Who knows?' Gael shrugged, turning away towards the horizon. Beside him Jaspin was silent.
The four of them now sat on the roof of the manor where Lilith lived. She would be oblivious to their presence, and from here they had a good vantage point. They would know if she left the house. They could watch over her.
'She'll come around' Reuben said, only half heartedly. 'She has to.'
'We can't force her to come with us' Aski said.
'She can't stay here.'
'Why not?' Reuben asked.
'Because….it is happening…'
Aski hugged his knees to him.
'I wonder what she's been through in the months since she left us' he thought aloud.

Lilith walked carefully through the busy streets, making her way forwards towards the home her mother and father rented, where they were staying in their time searching for Beatrice's mother.

Lilith had allowed several weeks to pass before daring this visit. Her father had said he would allow her to visit, but they were not expecting her at any specific time, and as Lilith walked, she felt her stomach twist into knots. She took a deep breath, scratching her sweaty palms as she made her way towards the home.

She didn't remember feeling more anxious in her life. She desperately wanted them to accept her. She didn't know if they would do so, after all this time.

When she found the place, she stood before the door for several minutes, before mustering the courage to knock.

She waited, heart hammering in her chest.

Ken answered the door.

Lilith's heart skipped a beat as she saw from his expression, that he was surprised to see her there.

'Lilith' he said.

'H-hello father.' She forced a smile. 'May I come in?'

He hesitated.

'Wait here a moment.'

Lilith tried not to feel disappointed, nervous and hurt as Ken closed the door again.

Behind her in the street, people passed back and forth. As she waited, she listened, hearing the footsteps and the murmuring of the crowd.

She balled her fists, staring hard at the door; she sent a quick prayer to whichever god might be listening, praying for the door to open again, and for her to be allowed in.

Please she thought. *Oh please…*

The door opened, and her heart jolted as she saw Ken standing there.

'I've told your mother you're here' he said to her. 'You can come in.'

Lilith set out a deep breath.

'Thank you' she bowed to him, as Ken stepped back, allowing her to enter.

The home was small, the corridor narrow, but at a glance Lilith saw that it was pleasant. It was clean, and comfortable, and warm.

Lilith stood in the hallway awkwardly as her father closed the door behind her. She stared nervously up at him as he regarded her, standing very close to her in the narrow corridor.

'Follow me' he mumbled to her.

Lilith's heels tapped on the floor as she walked after him. The first room they came to was a living room, homely. And that is when Lilith saw her grandmother for the first time in her life, sitting at a small table on a large sofa, opposite her mother.

Her heart stopped in her chest as she saw her, her breath was completely stolen away.

'Grandmother' Lilith breathed, for a moment; she was unsure how the old lady would react.

But her fears she found were needless, when the old lady broke into a wide smile.

Beatrice watched mutely as her mother rose to her feet at the sight of Lilith, gliding over to her and sweeping her up in her arms.

'My dear granddaughter' she said, embracing her tightly. 'I've finally met you after all this time.'

Tears prickled in Lilith's eyes as she was held, still in shock her arms limp at her side.

'I'm so happy' the old lady said.

'Oh grandmother…'

Her grandmother broke away, letting go of her and brushing the tears from her cheek. Lilith saw she had pale skin, and the same white hair as her.
'We're going to be the best of friends' her grandmother said. 'I just know it.'
But their bond lasted only a short time. It wasn't long later, when Lilith's grandmother died.
'Was it old age?' Lilith asked her father sadly, as she stood by his side in the church, the body of her grandmother lying before her on a stone table, covered by a white cloth.
'No' Ken shook his head. 'It was the illness.'
The last few days of her grandmother's life, her health had deteriorated rapidly. Her skin had become sickly pale and began to flake away. She had shivered violently, even in the hot room beneath the many blankets they had given her, and she had thrown up what looked like black sludge.
'I'm just glad she's not suffering anymore' Lilith spoke quietly.
It had been hard for all of them these last few days, but especially for Lilith's mother. Beatrice had been devastated at her death, and has shut herself in her room, refusing to see anyone, even refusing food. Lilith was beginning to worry for her now.
'Why…?' Lilith whispered. 'Why did this have to happen?'
'She was old' Ken said, trying to comfort her.
'No' Lilith shook her head. 'That wasn't it.'
She buried her face in her hands, crying silently.
Ken placed a hand on her shoulder, and she turned to him, wrapping her arms around him and holding him, he in turn, held her back.
Above them, completely unseen, two of the angels watched, Jaspin and Aski.

It was shortly after that, that the others made themselves known again.
Lilith answered the knock on the front door, and saw them standing there.
'Hi' Reuben said quietly. 'We've brought you something.'
Lilith looked down to what he was holding. In his hands was a cake. It was a beautiful piece. A three tier cake painted vibrant colours, intricately detailed with a stream of flowers running down one side.
It was a tradition for many, the day after the New Years fireworks to buy an expensive cake as a token of celebration. The cakes that were produced were expensive and of beautiful designs and delicious tastes. They were in themselves masterpieces, and pieces of art.
'The new year has gone?' Lilith said in disbelief. 'I…I didn't realise. I thought the fireworks….'
'They've been held off this year' Reuben told her. 'There's….been a lot of death in the city recently.'
Lilith pursed her lips. She had known this already, but had tried not to think about. People were beginning to die all around them, and no one knew why.
'I suppose you want to come in?'
They shared the cake between them, Ben and one of the servants joined them also. Walter was away that day.
Lilith was sure they would have pressed her about the earth maiden again, whoever she was, had Ben and the servant not been there. But in their presence, they kept their silence.
They talked for a brief time between them, Lilith keeping mostly silent.

At the earliest opportunity, Lilith showed them the door again.
It was late by the time they left, and Walter only arrived after they had gone, for which Lilith was grateful for. She didn't much feel like tolerating them with her husband around also.
Once the others were gone, and the house was silent, Lilith put Ben to bed.
'Can you read me a bedtime story?' he asked her.
'You're old enough to read yourself a bedtime story' Lilith told him.
'But I want you to read it to me.'
Lilith frowned down at him.
'Alright' she relented, drifting across the room and over to the bookshelf. 'What do you want to read?'
'You pick something' he said to her. 'No matter what it is, I'm sure I will love it.'
Lilith took a book from the shelf, *The Lamb and the Shepard*. She brought a chair to sit beside Ben's bed; then began to read.
'Far away, in a meadow of blue flowers…was a lamb…'
Later that night, after Lilith had finished the story, she lay on the bed beside Ben, holding him while he slept. Resting on her side, she lay a wing gently across his body, warming him.

Early the next morning, Martin was out of the city, deep in the woods that grew nearby, hunting.
He crouched close to the ground, dressed in a rainproof cloak mottled green and brown, to protect him against the drizzle.
He moved slowly, calculating each footstep as he crept forward.
The deer before him was oblivious to his presence, chewing lazily as it gazed about the woods.
Martin straightened, clinging close to one of the trees as he drew the string of the bow back.
He aimed.
The deer before him tensed suddenly. Martin frowned, holding his posture as he watched.
The deer began to stagger; then collapsed. Martin remained where he was. The deer fell to its knees, stumbling around in circles before falling to its side.
Martin lowered his bow.
The deer began to convulse, it stretched suddenly, head thrown back, before exhaling deeply, breathing its final breath before dying.
Martin stood over the body of the deer. The next week, he was dead.

'This is why we have to find the earth maiden' Reuben said to Lilith, after they had attended his funeral and his body buried.
'Not this again' Lilith grumbled.
She turned to the others, all four of them watching her expectantly.
'I have a life here' Lilith told them, 'a husband, a son.' She glowered. 'I am not going anywhere.'
'It's ok' Aski said confidently. 'We will wait for as long as it takes.'
'I assure you' Lilith growled at him, 'you will be waiting for a long time.'

A few months later, Walter became gravely ill.

Lilith knelt by his bed, holding his hand in hers.
‘It pains me to see you like this’ she whispered, not trusting her voice to speak properly.
‘I'm sorry’ Walter mumbled back to her, ‘but I am old…its now my time…’
‘I can’t bear to be parted from you’ she sobbed.
‘Lilith…’
‘I love you’ she whispered to him.
‘Oh child…’ the edges of Walter’s eyes crinkled in a sad smile. ‘I wish I could say the same.’
Lilith faltered.
‘You still love her don’t you?’ she asked him. ‘Your Molly.’
‘Yes…’ Walter whispered back staring past her. ‘I do.’ He drew a steady breath. ‘I will join her soon. For that I am sure.’ He looked back at Lilith. ‘You have been good to me over these last few months…I wanted to thank you…’
Lilith stared at him, holding her breath, not knowing what to say.
‘Lilith’ Walter gasped. ‘Could you….get me that over there?’
Lilith looked around to where he was pointing. She saw a small picture propped up on the mantelpiece, the one she had grown very familiar with over the months. One of many he had of his precious Molly, his beloved.
Lilith rose from her seat, making her way slowly across the room and towards the painted picture. She picked it up carefully, gazing down at it. It was a portrait of Molly on a beach, wearing a top hat, a thick dress and heavy furs around her neck. She had a hand up to her forehead, perhaps shielding her eyes from the sun, or brushing her hair back from the wind.
Lilith turned back to Walter, holding the picture in her hands.
She stepped across the room and handed it to him. Walter extended a shaking hand to take it from her.
‘Thank you’ he whispered. ‘Now…please leave me. No one is to enter this room now until tomorrow morning. Not even you. Do you understand?’
‘Yes’ Lilith spoke quietly. She turned from him, heading to the door.
Before she closed it, she glanced back once last time towards her husband. But he was not looking at her; he was looking at the picture of Molly.
Lilith lowered her eyes, and closed the door.
The next morning, he was dead.

The funeral was the very next day. Many turned up, but Lilith stood at the head of the crowd as the coffin was lowered into the ground, beside the grave of Molly.
It was what he would have wanted.
Lilith only half listened to the words of the priest as the deceased was laid to rest. Only a short time and it was over. The mound of earth was pushed back over Walter’s casket, and the many that had turned up, began to disperse. Lilith wandered away from the sea of black-dressed figures that filled the graveyard, and off on her own to a secluded spot beneath the trees that grew at the edges of the field of graves.
She leant against the low branch of a tree, sighing deeply and staring blankly out.
She pulled off her large hat, and the black veil that covered her face, letting the chilled breeze of the cloudy day to cool her skin.

She breathed slowly, thinking about what was to come ahead. She didn't know what she could do now. Without her husband, she couldn't afford the large house she lived in, which meant she would have to sell everything, which meant the family that shared her roof would have to now fend for themselves.
Lilith bowed her head.
Perhaps she would have to start a new life all over again. Perhaps it was time to move on, and travel to different places where she could grow new roots and start from scratch.
I've done it more than once. I can do it again. But where would I go? She wondered to herself.
'I saw this coming you know' a male voice suddenly spoke.
Lilith tensed slightly in surprise. She looked around to see the speaker behind her.
'Jaspin' she said. 'So you do talk after all.'
'I do' Jaspin said coming beside her and leaning on the same branch a short distance apart from her. 'It's the sickness' he said. 'It starts with a paling of the skin that turns a sickly shade. Then the vomiting. A strange black sludge the body produces…don't know what it is. And then those affected begin to shiver, feeling incredibly cold, even in the heat.' Jaspin glanced at her before continuing. Lilith did not react to his words, but he knew she was still listening. 'Finally, the skin begins to flake away, followed by a gradual deterioration of the muscles, until death comes, as one by one the organs shut down. Many have died from it, and many more will die in days to come.'
'All men die' Lilith replied flatly. 'Eventually.'
'It's always sad when it comes too soon though.'
'He was ready' Lilith answered, looking up across the field. 'He has been ready for a long time.' She looked towards Jaspin. 'What do you want?'
'I wanted to speak to you.'
Lilith waited silently for him to go on.
'We need all five of us…to find the earth maiden.'
'Oh not this again' Lilith huffed. 'Why do we need to find her? Who is she?'
'There are…' Jaspin spoke slowly. 'So many questions…and so many answers. I will tell you, but I don't want a long explanation now.'
Lilith turned away.
'We came here' Jaspin went on, 'to find you. Without you, we can't find *her*.'
'Mmhhh-hhmm.'
'We need all of us to find her' Jaspin pressed.
'Yes you've said. And I heard you the first time.'
Lilith rose and straightened up.
'I'm sorry Jaspin, but I need time to gather my thoughts. There is much must do now.'
'Of course' Jaspin nodded once. 'We will wait here as long as it takes for you. We can't leave without you, or else our search will be futile.'
Lilith walked away from him without another word.
'Lilith' he called her back.
She paused but did not turn.
'Why do you think you've never truly found happiness in your life? You will never find a place in life unless you accept who you truly are.'

Lilith walked away. She felt his eyes on the back her head she went, but she didn't care. Her mind was far away and on other things at that time.

Chapter Nineteen
A Life Left Behind

Lilith after her husband's death; had a lot of work to do. She sold the home that had become hers, given to her by Walter in his will. She inherited a lot of money from this, but kept only as much as she could carry. The rest she used to buy a home for the pale family, who now cared for Ben, they had promised to raise him as if he were their own, as a thank you for everything Lilith had done for them.
'Goodbye' Lilith said, kneeling to embrace Ben, wiping the tears from his face. 'Be a good boy.'
'I will' he sobbed, as Lilith rose again.
She turned to the family, hugging each of them in turn.
'I will miss all of you' she said to them.
'We will never forget you' the pale father said. 'Thank you for everything.'
'It was my pleasure' Lilith said, grasping him by the shoulder. 'I know you will take good care of Ben' she told them.
'We will.'
Lilith smiled to them.
'Goodbye.'
She turned from them, and walked away.
Lilith travelled away from the good lands, journeying with Reuben, Aski, Gael and Jaspin to places far away.
Places unknown.

PART 5

'So where are we going?' Lilith asked the others.
They had travelled far from the golden country, and were out in the wilderness.
Lilith had waited many days before asking them this question.
'We are searching for the earth maiden' Reuben told her.
'Why?'
'Because' Reuben said, 'she has the power to cure the sickness.'
Lilith turned to him. 'And you know this?'
'We need you to help us find her' Aski said.
'Why?' Lilith repeated.

‘We angels have a natural bond with the earth maiden’ Gael told her. ‘We are drawn to her. That’s why we need as many as possible to find her.’
‘So what about the other angels?’ Lilith asked. ‘Do you think we could find more like us?’
‘We’ve tried’ Jaspin spoke up, breaking his many hours of silence. ‘But they are elusive.’
They sat in silence around the fire. Lilith hugged her knees as she stared at the dancing flames.
‘You know’ Gael spoke up, ‘the most powerful one of us will be forced to reveal himself soon…or *herself*.’
‘What do you mean?’ Lilith asked.
‘The black and white angel’ Gael breathed, ‘is the most powerful one amongst our kind.’
‘And you think it’s me?’ Lilith asked incredulous.
‘It could be any one of us’ Gael said.
‘How do you know?’ she asked.
‘Because this angel is too powerful to be able to hide from others of our kind’ Gael told her. ‘We would sense their presence, but not be able to pinpoint them exactly.’
‘And you think it’s me?’ Lilith said again.
Gael moved closer to her, sliding towards her.
‘I am sure of it’ he told her seductively.
Gael tilted her chin back with a finger, leaning forward and kissing her.
Jaspin raised his head. The others watched Lilith expectantly, wondering what she would do. But she did not return the kiss, nor did she resist.
Gael leant back, smiling. ‘Lilith’ he said with gentle eyes. ‘You haven’t changed.’
‘It’s not me’ Lilith told flatly.
‘Oh but I think it is’ Gael gleamed.
‘It could be any one of us’ Lilith said. ‘Even you.’
‘You're right’ Gael leant back, smirking.
Reuben and Aski watched silently. Jaspin poked the fire distracted.

That night, the five of them lay on the forest floor to rest. Gael gazed over Lilith’s sleeping body as he sat next to her, he smiled warmly.
‘Sleep well’ he whispered. ‘My little seraph.’
He kissed her cheek swiftly, before lying down next to her and giving himself into his dreams. Nearby Jaspin watched him closely for a moment, before he too closed his eyes, and slept.

Days later, the group of five came to a camp, crowded with the sick and dying.
‘What is this place?’ Lilith asked as they wandered through the bodies of families huddled together around the fires. ‘Was there a war? Are these refugees?’
‘No’ Jaspin answered solemnly from beside her. They slowed to a stop. ‘It’s the sickness.’

Chapter Twenty
First Flight

‘There must have been many that have died’ Lilith said in a distant voice, casting her sight out across the mass of suffering. ‘A friend of mine died a long time ago, a sister…Claret I think she was called. She was very sick….I never realised how sick until after she died.’ She hugged her knees as she sat. ‘My grandmother….my husband…gods…I hope Ben will be alright.’
‘You cannot protect him from the sickness’ Reuben told her, sitting by her side. He scratched at his chin briefly. ‘No one can.’
Aski, Reuben and Jaspin had wandered away from them. They were about…somewhere.
‘I worry about him’ Lilith said mournfully, resting her chin upon her knees. ‘I hope he grows to be happy….and dies a good old age.’
‘Don’t we all wish the same’ Reuben grumbled. He stiffened slightly as a figure approached them. ‘Gael. Is she here?’
‘No’ he shook his head. ‘We cannot find her.’ His shoulders slumped in disappointment. ‘She is not here.’
‘What makes you think she will be here?’ Lilith asked them.
‘She is healer’ Reuben explained, ‘the only one who can save us from the sickness. The best place we have a chance to find her…is with the dying.’
‘And you really think she can cure the sickness?’ Lilith asked.
‘We have faith’ Reuben told her.
Lilith rose to her feet, moving away. ‘I need to be alone’ she mumbled.
They did not speak to her. Gael took the empty space on the floor she had occupied, sitting beside Reuben.
The two of them brooded in silence.

Lilith wandered alone, walking away from the mass of people and towards a great tower which grew out of the rocks, built at the very edge of the cliff.
It was an empty building, and an ancient one. A wide tower built high into the sky. Made from the same grey throughout; a rock that had been transported from a quarry hundreds of miles away by thousands of slaves. The windows were all of different sizes and scattered in a disorganised fashion. The rooms inside were just as confused Lilith found, when she entered the tower. Inside, it was a maze. All the rooms were of different sizes, the corridors wound and twisted around, the stairs looped back and forth and up and down. It seemed that in no time at all, Lilith became lost within the tower.
Eventually she came to a window, one that looked out across the horizon.
The sea was utterly still like liquid glass. There was no land she could see, only water and sky. Only blue.
Lilith moved into the next room. Every room she came to was empty.
She stopped suddenly, seeing a man standing before her, a stranger.
Her eyes travelled down his body and to his hand, where he held a knife. Her attention flickered back to his face.

‘Usurper’ the stranger hissed. ‘Betrayers of god.’
‘What?’ Lilith gasped in shock.
‘You five are heathens’ the man said. ‘You have no place in heaven or on earth.’
He charged towards her then, plunging the knife deep into her navel and pushing her back.
Lilith stumbled; the back of her leg’s hit the low wall of the open window. She tipped back, and fell through the window, plummeting towards the sea below her.
Lilith screamed in terror, her primal fear taking over her body. She could no longer control herself. She could not control her wings, as they erupted from her back.
Beautiful large wings as white and pure as snow.
Lilith saw them briefly, before the water hit her.

Fighting towards the surface, Lilith’s could not hold her breath any longer. Even through the blood that misted the water, and the tangle of wings around her, she could see the surface moving further away from her, as her heavy clothes and wings pulled her closer to the sea bed.

Something broke through the surface of the water near her. Lilith was already unconscious by the time Jaspin swam towards her, grabbing her around her body and swimming with her towards the light above them. Her wings receded into her back as she lost consciousness, and Jaspin carried her up with relative ease.
He broke the surface of the water, drawing a deep breath and swimming with Lilith towards the shore where the other angels waited, holding his arm tightly around her as he went.
His feet met the sea bed as he reached shallow water. He carried her up the beach, laying her down gently onto dry sand.
‘Lilith’ Reuben moaned in despair at the sight of the stab wound. ‘Oh my god.’
‘Help her!’ Gael demanded.
Jaspin ignored all of them, pinching Lilith’s nose and leaning over her. He placed his mouth over hers, breathing into her.
As Aski watched over them, tears prickling in his eyes and heart racing, he noticed suddenly a strange figure beside him. A figure wearing a plague mask, hooded and cloaked, not an inch of their skin could be seen, they even wore gloves. He couldn’t even be sure if it was a man or woman.
The figure ignored them all, seemingly invisible to all of them save for Aski, the figure knelt beside Lilith’s unconscious body, lightly touching the wound in her navel. A light grew from the point the masked figure touched. Aski blinked; then the figure was suddenly gone. He wondered suddenly if he had truly seen what he thought he saw. His thoughts were broken suddenly when Lilith drew a deep gasp.
Rolling away from Jaspin she heaved, throwing up water and coughing violently. The others collectively breathed a sigh of relief, laughing and smiling at one another
‘You're alright!’ Gael cried.
Lilith turned back to them, just as Gael knelt beside her, sweeping her up in his arms.
‘I was so worried…’
‘Let go of her’ Jaspin snapped aggressively shoving him back.
‘Jaspin…’ Lilith gasped, ‘what are you…?’

‘Lilith’ Jaspin said gentler now. ‘Please lay back.’
Lilith did so, and Jaspin leant over her, touching her navel.
‘Impossible’ he breathed. ‘There is no wound…’
‘You saved me’ Lilith said to Jaspin, sitting up again. ‘You saved my life……thank you…’
Jaspin stared back at her wide-eyed.
He rose slowly then, turning then towards Aski. He punched him hard in the face.
Lilith cried out in shock as Aski fell back. Jaspin bore over him, grabbing Aski’s arms as he raised them to defend himself.
‘This is all your fault!’ Jaspin roared at him, snarling with a rage Lilith had thought incapable of him. For a moment she thought he might kill him. ‘You put her life in danger!’
‘Jaspin!’ Reuben cried, grabbing him and pulling him back. ‘Please!’
‘You nearly killed her!’ Jaspin screamed.
‘It would have happened anyway!’ Reuben hollered, dragging him away.
Aski crawled back away from him as Jaspin was pulled away.
‘What is the meaning of this?’ Lilith demanded of Jaspin. ‘Why would you do that?’
‘He let slip what we are’ Jaspin growled at Aski who hugged his knees, still sitting on the sands. ‘He told them what we are.’
‘I'm so ashamed’ Aski said, tears running from his eyes. ‘Lilith’ he whispered, raising his head. ‘I'm so sorry.’
‘It’s alright’ Lilith spoke gently. ‘I'm fine.’
‘But how?’ Reuben breathed. ‘You were stabbed. Where is the wound…?’
Lilith touched where the wound had been. There was no pain.
‘It’s a miracle’ Gael beamed. ‘You must be blessed.’
‘No’ Lilith mumbled. ‘None of us are blessed.’
‘We should get away from here’ Reuben said, offering his hand to Aski and helping him to his feet. ‘We are no longer welcome here.’
‘Were shall we go?’ Gael asked.
‘The next town is near here’ Reuben said. ‘We should go there.’
Jaspin turned to Lilith, giving her a strange look.

That night, the five of them stayed at an inn.
Jaspin left the others, and when Lilith went to look for him in the streets, she found him waiting for her. He offered his hand out to her.
‘Follow me’ he said. ‘There is something I wish to show you.’
They walked hand in hand away from the town, to a secluded place a short distance away. Jaspin led Lilith through an orchard where the fruit was ripe and the trees grew close. The full moon above them shone blue light down across the world, basking it in an ethereal glow.
Jaspin let go of Lilith’s hand, only when they were deep within the orchard, and could not be seen by prying eyes. He turned to her, lifting his head high as he considered her.
‘There is something I haven’t told the others’ he began. ‘Something I wish to keep secret from them. At least for now.’
‘And what is that?’ Lilith asked tentatively.

‘The black and white angel is the most powerful angel that exists. Long lived, and mighty, and has become a legend.’
‘It’s you’ Lilith spoke in the quiet night. ‘Isn't it.’
‘Yes.’
Jaspin turned his back to her.
‘I try to keep my identity secret’ he continued. ‘There are many who wish to harm me, to harm all of us…but…because I am the most powerful…I would be….how should I put it?’ he fell silent for a moment. ‘I would be the most valuable kill, like a trophy.’
He turned back to her.
‘The moment I saw you fall from that tower, the moment I saw your white wings….’ He trailed off.
‘Lilith…’ he said, extending a hand. ‘You and I are bound as one. We are meant to be together.’
Her eyes widened as she stared in shock.
‘Lilith’ he said to her. ‘Show me your wings.’
She hesitated then for a moment, as Jaspin stared expectantly. But then she relented.
Lilith drew a deep breath, and revealed her wings.
The brilliant white glow lit up the orchard around them as they erupted from her back, and Jaspin’s profile shone in the holy light. He bowed his head, eyes shining.
Lilith straightened her body, curling her wings around her and looking at herself. She had rarely seen her own wings, only a few times in her life.
‘They're so beautiful’ Jaspin said. ‘You're so beautiful.’
Lilith raised her eyes to his.
He stepped towards her, reaching a hand towards her, running his fingers along her wings.
‘Lilith’ he said. ‘Why did you fall from that tower?’
She faltered suddenly, fighting back tears.
‘I…’ she began. ‘I mean I…’
‘You can’t fly’ Jaspin realised in shock. ‘Can you.’
Tears began to shimmer in her eyes, and she looked at Jaspin pleading.
‘My father forbade me’ Lilith whispered. ‘My parents both thought I was an abomination...especially my mother. She hated me.’
Jaspin’s expression saddened then, his lips turned down and he became sorrowful.
‘I was always forced to hide who I truly was’ Lilith told him. ‘I have never flown before.’
‘Well…’ Jaspin said. ‘Now it’s time you learnt.’
He took her by the hand, leading her through the orchard and out into the open. They came to the edge of a cliff, a high drop above the sea below them, and before, wide open skies and a clear breezeless night.
‘There is a vast world out there’ Jaspin said throwing his arms open. ‘The land isn’t big enough to contain us. Our world is in the sky.’ Jaspin tilted his head. ‘The stars have come out to play.’ He smiled. ‘So beautiful’ he sighed. ‘So many other worlds are out there…so many other galaxies.’ The stars shone in his eyes. ‘No matter how high you fly’ he said, reaching a hand above him, ‘you will never reach them.’
‘What are galaxies?’ Lilith asked him.
‘It doesn’t matter’ Jaspin replied, lowering his hand.

He turned to Lilith beside him, standing tall and proud.
'Lilith' he said to her. 'Let your spirit soar.' He smiled handsomely. 'Follow my example.'
His wings grew out of his back, large they were. One pure white, the other hellish black.
Lilith barely had time to admire them before he leapt forwards, throwing himself off the cliff and casting his wings out.
Lilith hesitated, glancing tentatively at the drop below her.
She felt a little nervous at the drop, an emotion she should never feel towards such a thing.
The sky was her world, and she was born to fly.
Lilith bit back her doubts, and leapt forward, stretching her wings out wide, feeling the air beneath her feathers, and beginning to glide.
It was an exhilarating feeling. The freedom she suddenly felt, the power, and the familiarity, despite the fact she had never flown before. She picked it up, as if she had been flying everyday of her life.
She beat her snowy wings, climbing higher in the sky as she reached for Jaspin, who had slowed his pace for her.
Jaspin suddenly folded his wing, turning in the air and flying on his back. He reached for her, as she did for him. They held hands as they flew through the air.
Jaspin only let go when they began to drop close to the sea, flipping over in the air again and flying straight. They soared across the open world, two angels in their home.

They returned to the cliff edge minutes later, Lilith's wings receded into her back the moment her feet touched the ground.
She sat on the earth, hugging her knees to her and gasping.
She was exhausted.
'You fly so beautifully' she said to Jaspin who stood beside her. He wasn't in the least bit tired. It was as if he hadn't flown at all. 'You're so graceful, so perfect.' She glanced up at him. 'How do you fly like that?'
'I've had a lot of practice' he told her simply.
'I'm so tired…' Lilith sighed, resting her head in her arms.
Her shoulders began to tremble.
'You need to build up your muscle' he told her. 'Fly as often as you can, for as long as you can…and you will become strong.'
She lifted her head up at him.
'Look' Jaspin said, stroking the inside of his own wing. 'Come closer and see.'
Lilith rose gingerly to her feet. She felt a little sick, a little dizzy. But she forced herself to ignore these unpleasant feelings.
She approached Jaspin, and sat what he indicated.
Lilith saw beneath his fingers, a large vein running down his white wing. She knew his black wing had the same vein, as did both of her own wings.
'When we reveal our wings' Jaspin told her, 'we become stronger, but more vulnerable.' He indicated the vein, parting his feathers so that it could be seen. 'This vein is our most vital organ. But if it is cut, then there is no hope.'
'If the vein is damaged' Lilith said stepping back, '…we die.'
Lilith bowed her head.

‘Do you still miss her?’ Lilith asked out of the blue. ‘The woman you grieve for?’
She knew by his expression that she had caught him off guard.
‘How did you know?’ he asked.
‘Because the way you look at me.’ Lilith paused. ‘What happened?’ she asked gently.
‘She died’ Jaspin sighed. ‘Because of me.’
He looked for a moment as if he were about to go on, but he turned suddenly, facing in the direction of the town they had come from.
‘Something’s wrong’ he hissed.

They ran side by side back through the orchard towards the town, heading for the inn they were staying, where the noises were coming from.
When they got there, they were shocked by what they saw. Skidding to a halt they stood with the crowd that howled and threw rocks and waved torches.
Lilith gasped, grabbing onto Jaspin’s arms as she saw what the source of their strife was.
Gael was being dragged backwards through the door of the inn and out into the open before the crowd, kicking and screaming as he went. He clawed at the men that held him with a primal rage, snarling as he tried to hurt them.
Lilith noticed then with horror that Aski was being held at the edge of the crowd by many arms.
He was being attacked relentlessly, kicked and punched by several men as others hung behind him with knifes, ready to finish him when needed.
And Reuben lay on his front unmoved in the centre of the clearing the crowd created before the inn. Many figures loomed over him. Lilith thought with terror that he might already be dead.
‘Help them!’ Lilith cried to Jaspin, turning towards him and shaking him by the shoulder. ‘Please!’
Jaspin hesitated only for the briefest of moment, her urgency driving him to act more than anything else.
The words Jaspin had spoken rang through Lilith’s mind as his beautiful wings grew from his back again.
I try to keep my identity secret. There are many who wish to harm me, to harm all of us. I would be the most valuable kill, like a trophy.
The crowd gasped in horror and shock at the sight of him. Many tried to flee. Shouts of ‘usurper’ and ‘betrayer’ rang all around from the crowd.
Aski, who had been forced to his knees, raised his head as Jaspin tore towards him, slashing at the crowd and driving them back.
Lilith saw no weapon on him. But she saw blood rain.
Many of the people fell and cried out.
Jaspin rounded on the people behind him, his wings whipping around, casting a great shadow upon the earth.
Behind him Aski rose to his feet, revealing his own wings.
Steely silver. They glistened in the moonlight.
Together they rushed towards the men that surrounded Gael, pushing them back and freeing him.

Gael rose to his feet revealing his light blue wings.
Gael and Aski fought either side of Jaspin, flanking him. One of the braver men from the crowd moved closer to Jaspin from behind, swinging a sword and slashing at his back.
Jaspin seemed not to notice. In fact he didn't react at all.
As Lilith watched, she saw the wound on his back slowly fade away, until it disappeared altogether.
Lilith felt a sudden and sharp pain in her own back. She cried out in agony, reaching behind her and touching her skin. She gasped in shock at the sight of blood on her fingers.
The wound on Jaspin's back, she had received on her own.
'But how…?'
One of the men beside her noticed.
'You're one of them!' he cried. 'A fallen angel!'
Lilith turned towards him just as another man swung a club at her, striking her over the head.
Jaspin's eyes flashed as he saw Lilith fall to her knees. A ball of light shone brightly in his hand which he threw towards her.
The spell hit the ground right beside Lilith, exploding in a flash of brilliant white light, blinding all those around. Lilith crawled towards Jaspin, moving away from the crowd. He used his wings to shield himself from a barrage of arrow that were fired his way; crossing his wings before him he protected himself. He unfurled his wings again as Lilith drew closer to him, arrows protruding from his wings. He grabbed her roughly by the arm and haled her to her feet.
The angels drew closer to each another, backs to one other and facing out around the crowd that surrounded them. Jaspin stepped back, reaching towards Reuben who lay on his front unmoving, and lifting him in his arms.
He crouched suddenly, leaping up into the air and beating his wings hard, flying upwards and out of reach of the crowd.
Gael followed, flying after Jaspin, Aski flew after him, the three of them soaring through the sky.
Lilith was left on the ground.
She turned to face the crowd around her, wings growing from her back as she stared at the faces around her. Anger, hate, disgust, fear and uncertainty were all she saw staring back.
She ran forwards then, beating her wings as hard as she could and taking off, clearing the heads of the hoard below her. They roared in fury as she climbed higher in the sky, reaching up to try to grab her but missing.
She was out of their reach now, turning in the air and flying in the direction the others had gone, gasping with the effort of flying, and the pain from the wound in her back, oozing blood each time she beat her wings.

They flew for over ten minutes, Lilith descending when she could no longer fly, her whole body shaking with the effort of keeping herself in the air. She drew slowly closer to the ground, landing heavily and ungracefully, falling on her hands and knees and grazing herself.
She sat back on her heels, casting her eyes across the skies above her as her wings receded into her back.

The other angels were flying onwards, but they were descending in the sky, landing some distance away.
Lilith let out a heavy sigh, letting her body slump to the side.
She lay on the ground to rest, waiting for the others to find her.
She was utterly exhausted, body hot and trembling. The pain in her back from the wound now throbbed dully. Never before in her life had she exerted herself in such a way. Never before in her life had she flown. And to fly for so long…
She fell asleep in less than a minute, and by the time Gael reached her, she was far away.

Chapter Twenty One
A New Place

'I cannot believe this has happened' Jaspin growled angrily. 'I was hoping to keep my identity secret for just a little longer…'
He turned as Gael returned to them, carrying Lilith in his arms.
'Lilith!' Jaspin gasped.
He rose quickly, rushing up to her.
'It's alright' Gael told him. 'She's fine, she's just exhausted.'
'Lilith' Jaspin said to her, holding her face gently in his hands. 'Are you alright.'
'Oh Jaspin' she whispered back opening her eyes.
'Can you stand?' Gael asked her.
She gave a nod weakly.
Gael placed her gently on the ground, and Lilith stood, supporting her own weight.
Tears came to Jaspin's eyes as he saw the wound in her back. Lilith flinched as he touched her skin lightly.
'I'm sorry' Jaspin whispered to her. 'This is my fault. You were hurt because of me.'
'But how?' Lilith asked, her body hunched over, the great cut in her skin visible clearly through the tear in her dress. 'How did this happen?'

'You and I are bound as one' Jaspin told Lilith. 'We are meant to be together.'
'But how?' she mumbled to him as he tended to the wound on her back, cleaning it with a piece of Lilith's torn dress, soaked in the water from a nearby stream.
Beside them Reuben has regained consciousness at last. He had been severely beaten. There were wounds all over his body. Large bruising here and there, great slashes where he had been cut, grazes, a cut lip, a black eye and a great bump at the back of his head. This is what had knocked him out.
Aski and Gael were injured also, but no so badly as Reuben had been hurt. They both tended to him, each using torn fabric from their clothes to clean the blood away. When they were done they left him to rest. Now he lay still, resting on his back and gazing up at the stars over head.

Gael and Aski now tended to each other's injuries, as Jaspin tended to Lilith's.
'Black angels' Jaspin explained, 'and white angels are both bound to me. I am the strongest angel.'
He paused for a moment, dabbing the cloth gently against her skin.
'They act as a shield for me' Jaspin went on, 'and I am the weapon. If I am injured in battle, then the black angels and white angels bear the damage. That is why you are hurt…I'm sorry.'
'Is that how *she* died?' Lilith asked quietly. 'The woman you grieve for…you said she died because of you…'
Jaspin drew back slightly. Lilith wondered for a moment if she had hurt him. She began to feel nervous when at first he didn't speak, thinking that she had said the wrong thing.
'Yes' Jaspin finally answered, speaking quietly. He placed the cold rag against her skin again, wiping away the blood. 'I was fighting…I took too much damage….' He gritted his teeth. 'I was careless….she died because of me…it was all my fault.'
'No' Lilith whispered. 'It was an accident.'
'I loved her' Jaspin said. 'I should have been more careful.'
Lilith hugged her knees, staring unfocused at the ground.
'How did we become bound as one?' Lilith asked him. 'Was I born with this attachment to you?'
'No. The bond forms only on physical contact. When I carried you from the sea, the bond between us was sealed. I'm sorry…I should not have touched you.'
'No' Lilith mumbled. 'I was glad. You saved my life. If it wasn't for you I would have died.'
'But you are in danger because of me' Jaspin told her, leaning back from her having finished cleaning the wound, which had stopped bleeding now.
Lilith turned to him.
'I told you' Jaspin said. 'I am a target. I am the most powerful, the most sought after, and now that I have revealed myself, I will be hunted…' his expression sadden. 'You will die now because of me.'
'No' Lilith shook her head. 'I will live.'
'How can you be so sure?' he asked her.
'Because I have faith in you' she answered.
He reached to her face, touching her gently.
'Seaden said the exact same thing to be before.'
'Was that her name?' Lilith asked him. 'Seaden?'
'Yes' Jaspin said lowering his hand. 'She was a black angel.'
He drew away from her.
'I miss her more than the earth. She died a very long time ago…but after all these years…the pain of her loss still has not left me.'
Lilith gazed up at him with wide eyes.
She reached tentatively towards him, touching his chest, before leaning into him, embracing him, as he embraced her.
'I will do what I can to keep you safe' Jaspin whispered, resting his cheek against her hair.
'As will I' Lilith replied.

‘How did they find out about us?’ Lilith asked later as she pulled the arrows from Jaspin’s wings. His wings were riddled with them; they were embedded deep in his flesh, but seemed to cause him no pain as she pulled them out one by one.
‘Word spread’ Jaspin growled, turning to glare at Aski.
‘I'm sorry’ Aski said. ‘I wish I could take it back.’
‘Leave him alone’ Gael shot at Jaspin. ‘It would have happened eventually anyway. Personally I'm glad it happened. It feels so good to be myself again. It feels so good to be *free!*’
His wings erupted from his back, coloured a beautiful light blue shade, they glistened in the moonlight.
‘I am myself again’ Gael sighed content, closing his eyes and reaching his wings out wide. ‘The breeze between my feathers…’ he opened his eyes, ‘…it’s so liberating.’
‘We shouldn’t linger’ Jaspin told him, rising to his feet once Lilith had removed the last arrow. His wings glowed before fading away. Once again he appeared as a normal man. ‘They will come after us.’ He walked over to Reuben who still lay on his back. He offered a hand out to him. ‘Can you walk?’ he asked him.
‘I believe so’ Reuben mumbled, grasping Jaspin’s hand and planting his feet on the floor.
Jaspin hauled him to his feet and Reuben groaned as he straightened.
‘We should travel on foot for a while’ Jaspin told the others, ‘it will give us a chance to rest our wings’ he said glancing towards Lilith.
‘Where are we heading towards?’ Aski voiced.
‘I don’t think the earth maiden is in these lands’ Jaspin said. ‘I say we head across the desert. There is an old friend of mine I wish to see, one I have not seen for a long time.’
‘Who is it?’ Gael asked.
‘A black angel’ Jaspin answered in a grumble. ‘He has connections. He will help us find the other angels. The more of us there are, the easier it will be for us to find the earth maiden. The more of us there are gathered together, the more she will feel our presence, and the more we will feel hers.’
‘So we travel across the desert’ Aski said.
‘My friend the black angel is a wise man’ Jaspin went on. ‘He lives in a study with many books. He is an alchemist, a biologist, a scholar…’ Jaspin paused. ‘It’s time we saw each other again.’

‘Who is this man?’ Lilith asked Jaspin as they walked across the land.
‘A childhood friend’ Jaspin replied.
‘Are you bound to him as you are to me?’ she asked.
‘No. We both knew about the bond early on and didn’t want such a bond…I didn’t want him to be hurt because of me and so we stopped the bond from ever forming….were were very careful. We would both always wear gloves when we were around each other, and would always be extra careful never to touch each other. I've still got those gloves on me’ Jaspin added, pulling a pair of worn gloves from his person, before returning them to his pocket.
‘It has been far too long time since I last saw him’ Jaspin said forlorn, ‘and I miss him very much.’

The journey across the desert was long and arduous. The orange rocks around them were hard, the earth dry and the sun hot. Jaspin glanced back at Lilith as they walked, everyone was exhausted, Lilith especially so.

'You're weak' Gael told her at one point. 'You don't travel enough.'

'Thank you Gael' Lilith told him sarcastically. 'Your comments are most helpful.'

'Don't worry' Gael gleamed putting an arm around her. 'You'll have lots of exercise as long as you stick with us.'

'Of that I don't doubt' Lilith grumbled, too tired to even bother pushing him away.

'You'll build up your strength soon enough' Gael continued encouragingly.

'When do we fly?' Reuben asked Jaspin.

'At nightfall' Jaspin mumbled back as they trudged onwards, 'when its cooler. If we fly now we will overheat in this desert. To even attempt to fly now would only cause us harm.'

'So when do we rest?' Aski asked Jaspin.

'We don't. Not until we get there.'

Reuben slowed to a stop, glancing back at Jaspin. His face was still heavily bruised, and the cuts would take days to heal.

'Do you remember where this place is?' he asked Jaspin.

'Yes' Jaspin replied. 'More or less.'

That evening, as the sun touched the horizon, the angels paused momentarily, waiting for it to sink into the horizon. The instant the last glimmer of its rays were gone, they released their wings.

Jaspin revealed his wings first, signalling the others to do the same. Lilith watched at his beautiful feathers grew from his back, one wing black, and the other white. Aski and Gael called forth their own wings, Aski's silver like the edge of a sword, and Gael's pale blue like the sky.

And Reuben's, when he called them forth, where a deep and burnished gold, striking they were, they glistened, even in the dying light.

'Are you well enough to fly?' Jaspin asked him.

'Don't worry about me' Reuben waved him off. 'I'll be fine.'

Jaspin turned to glance at Lilith. She thought for a moment that he might say something to her. But he turned his back to her, crouching his body and leaping into the sky, beating his wings downwards and beginning to climb higher towards the clouds.

Lilith held her skirt down at the downdraft from his wings caused a wind. Around her the others took off until only Lilith was left standing.

She let out a weary sigh, body and mind utterly exhausted from everything that had happened.

But she pushed all that to the back of her mind, unfurling her wings and following the others as they followed Jaspin.

The five angels flew over the desert, heading to the place where Jaspin's old friend lived.

The black angel.

Chapter Twenty Two
The Study

The five angels flew for many hours across the desert with Jaspin leading the way, soaring amongst the clouds in this still world, this separate world.
The world the angels experienced was a different one to the one that humans lived in. Here they could be free, unhindered by the troubles of men.
Here, they were themselves.

Only when they saw their destination in sight, did they begin their descent.
Lilith's feet touched the ground and she straightened up.
'How are you feeling?' Jaspin asked her.
'My muscles ache' Lilith replied, 'but I feel myself growing stronger.'
Jaspin gave a nod. He turned to face the tower.
'Is this the place?' Reuben asked doubtfully. 'It seems rather small.'
'How much space does one man need?' Jaspin asked him.
As Lilith observed the building before her, she saw a basic structure. It was a simple rectangular flat-topped building, with arched windows covered by wooden shutters to keep out the suns heat. Built at one corner above the rest of the building was a tower, with a conical roof and a single window at its head. The whole structure was very basic, made of yellow stone with no adornment or embellishment at all on the outside; it blended very well with the surrounding rock. From a distance, it would have been near enough impossible to see.
'Did he live here?' Gael asked doubtfully. 'And for how long?'
'He spent the majority of his life here' Jaspin explained. 'He travels a lot at times, but this is the place he calls home.'
'And he will be here?' Lilith asked him.
'This is the most likely place we will find him' Jaspin finished.
He marched up to it, indicating no further wish for talk. The others followed.
'How are you?' Gael asked hanging back to speak to Lilith. 'Are you feeling alright?'
'I'm a little tired' she confessed.
'Your first real flight' Gael nodded. 'It is an exhausting experience. Next time however, you will be able to fly even further.'
She nodded to him.
Reuben and Aski followed Jaspin as he ascended the steps to the building, leading to a simple door in one side. The only door. The entrance.
Lilith and Gael stood at the bottom of the steps, waiting expectantly as Jaspin reached his hand out and slowly opened the door.
He stepped into the building, Reuben and Aski followed behind, and after them, Lilith and Gael climbed the steps and moved through the archway.
Lilith closed the door after them, and turned to face the room.

The beauty within the room reflected none of the bland design on the outside, and for a moment it felt as if they had stepped into another place altogether. The room inside was not only beautiful, but stunning, comfortable, even homely.
The first thing that Lilith noticed when she stepped forward was the air. It was pleasantly cool compared to the hot and humid air outside. The ground Lilith walked on she noticed, was made of marble, with the most beautiful turquoise stone set into the marble itself in the shape of swirls and crescents, a stone that glistened like the sun reflecting off the ocean surface. Around her there were shelves full of books, many desks with an assortment of notes and papers, more books, but also some little decorations. Dried flowers in vases, forever beautiful but delicate. Crystals and rubies and amber holding insects. Lilith reached for the desk, lifting in her hands a curious thing indeed, a thing she had not seen before. A trilobite, so perfectly fossilized it looked as if it had been designed.
'Such a strange thing' Lilith commented, placing it carefully back upon the desk and continuing to examine the room.
Around her the other angels were doing the same, exploring every inch. Touching the books on the shelves, shuffling through the notes and sifting through the drawers.
Against one side of the room and set into the wall, was a half-circle fountain, trickling water into a shallow pool. Lilith crossed the room to reach it, padding lightly across an old carpet that was rolled out beneath it, a faded red carpet that looked to be ancient, almost an antique. When Lilith touched the water in the pool, she felt its cold chill.
'I don't think he's here' Reuben said, descending into a luxurious velvet sofa and sinking into the many large cushions that surrounded him.
'There's nothing up in the tower' Gael said, having wandered up the spiral staircase to the tower and returned seconds later. 'There must be more' Gael mused to himself. 'You said he lived here for ages. 'Where does he sleep? And where are all his clothes?'
Jaspin glanced down at the rug before the fountain. He indicated for Lilith to move aside, reaching down and pulling the rug back. Hidden beneath it was a trapdoor.
Jaspin knelt, pulling the door back and peering in.
Below them was another room, one with a large bed, chests lining one wall, several stacked on top of one another and a large tub in one corner that looked as if it were meant for a bath. The other walls were covered by hanging tapestries, their designs could not be clearly seen, as it was dark in the room below them.
'He's not here' Jaspin said glumly, closing the trapdoor and covering it again with the rug.
'Jaspin' Aski spoke out, 'this book…it's about you…'
The other drifted towards him. Reuben rose from the sofa and loomed over his shoulder, as the five of them gazed down at the open book, a massive book, and one that was ancient-looking.
In the open book, was a crude sketch of a man with unfurled wings. One of them was white, and the other was black.
'It's a diary entry' Aski realised, flicking through the book to the last page. He began to read.
'*I'm sorry Jaspin'* it read, '*if you are reading this, then I have already passed on. I know that you will look for me one day, and I'm sorry we were unable to meet, but I have succumbed to the illness. My body is in the desert somewhere, lost in the sands*.' He ran his finger over the page as he continued to read. '*The other angels are dead. Whoever you come to this place*

which, whichever angels accompany you Jaspin, they are the last, all others have been claimed by the sickness. I'm sure you are looking for a cure for the sickness, and the earth maiden. I know where she is likely to be. The last place I knew her to be is in this place.' Aski turned his attention to the opposite page where there was a map. 'There are co-ordinates' he continued in a mumble.
Jaspin bowed his head, walking away from the others silently.
'This office is well kept' Gael noted. 'He must have died recently.
'I knew the other angels were dead' Reuben said mournfully. 'I felt it….an….absence in the world….'
Lilith reached to the book, flicking back to the earliest entries. She gasped in surprise at what she saw. The start of the diary written here was not written by the black angel, the friend of Jaspin, but by Jaspin himself.
'Jaspin' Lilith uttered. 'This was written by you.'
'So?' he mumbled glumly, standing with his back to her and trying to hide his grief after learning of the death of his friend.
'This entry…' Lilith whispered, raising her head to face him, 'it's over two hundred years old.'
Jaspin turned to face her, his expression unreadable. Around him the other angels stared.
'It says here that you came from heaven itself…' Lilith continued reading, 'the celestial plains….it says that you were the right-hand of god…and for years before you came here on earth…served at his side…'
'Those are just stories' Jaspin mumbled.
'No' Reuben said. 'I remember them too.'
'You've been to heaven?' Lilith asked him in shock.
'I was born on the celestial plains' Reuben told her. 'I am old, but not as old as Jaspin, the strongest of all angels. Some say' he said turning to Jaspin, 'that the black and white angel is thousands of years old.' He paused. 'Is that true?'
'There are many stories about me' Jaspin replied.
'You were born on the celestial plains?' Gael began excitedly. 'What are they like?'
'I…' Reuben mumbled, '…don't remember.'
'I was born on this earth' Gael said disappointed at Reuben's response.
'As was I' Aski told them.
'Me too' Lilith said.
'Why are you here on earth?' Aski said to Jaspin. 'Did god no longer love you?'
'I was….' Jaspin began reluctantly, '….cast out…'
'Why?'
'I….fell in love with a human' Jaspin said. 'God cast me from heaven, and I was reincarnated as a child, born to a human mother, and raised in a family.' He drew a stead breath. 'By the time I was old enough to remember my past and the reason I was rejected from heaven….I had already forgotten the name and face of the woman I had fallen in love with…as was my punishment.' He turned his back to the others then. 'I grew up, but because of what I was, I was different from others around me, even my own family.' His eyes lowered to the ground as he spoke. 'I've been alone for a very long time. My family died in ages past…I don't even remember their faces, I don't even remember how they died, I don't even remember my own

family at all….' he paused. 'I don't remember my own parents…I can't remember if I had any siblings, cousins, aunts or uncles…it was so long ago.'
'You had your friend the black angel' Aski told him, 'and maybe it's a good thing you don't remember your past. I've not been around for as long as you have, and I remember…..' he drew a slow breath, 'I remember the pain.'
The others turned to him now, Aski being the centre of attention.
'My lover was an angel' Aski told the others, 'we had two children, two boys…both angels…they died…all of them…my family…I lost them.' He leant back against the desk as he continued. 'The sickness has been around for a long time, only now it's getting worse…even angels are susceptible to it, but we don't know where it comes from…it could be in the air…the water….the earth….it could even be genetic….who knows…' his eyes became distant then. 'I kissed her' he said. 'I kissed her when she was sick…I should have fallen sick myself' he said touching his own lips, 'I had hoped that it would but….I alone survived, while my family died. I alone survived and watched them die…one by one…' He touched the stone at his neck, the blood red stone. 'This holds some of her blood, infected blood. It's all I have left of her.'
'I had a similar experience' Reuben voiced. 'I grew up in an orphanage. Everyone around me died because of the sickness. Everyone died except for me. I grew up quickly from a very young age and spend my early life fending for myself…never depending on anyone.'
'I wish I had such upbringing' Gael spoke up mournfully. 'I wish the people I had loved died through illness and not due to the fault of anyone else. My father killed my mother when he found out she was an angel. I still remember his screams as he called that he was coming for me next. I was still very young at the time, and had not flown yet. My father threw me off the seaside cliff we lived by. I fell like a stone, waking up some hours later to find a masked figure standing over me, a mask with a long beak and eyes like windows, through which I could see nothing. He cared for me, tended to my injuries, healed my broken bones and sent me on my way……I never saw him nor my father again.' He crossed his arms. 'I knew the other angels were dead, though I didn't want to believe it. The masked figure told me the sickness had claimed them all, that is why he imprisoned us all together later on, we had all been found, we were trapped together, while Lilith…the last angel…drew closer and closer to us….'
'I…' Lilith began. 'I never knew' she said staring at all of them. 'I never knew any of this.'
'We've all got a maggot in our past' Gael said unfolding his arms, 'Jaspin, Aski, Reuben and myself. And you Lilith, you who have lived a life of loneliness and solitude, rejected by your own parents, losing your own grandmother, the only family member who loved you, so soon after meeting her for the first time.' He turned away. 'All we have now is each other.'
'My grandmother…' Lilith spoke. 'She was a blonde angel…she showed me her wings…before she died.' Lilith brushed the tears away, even though she had known her grandmother for only a short time, the loss still cut her deep, and stung bitterly. 'There is no one else in my family that was an angel' Lilith finished, '…only me.'
'Now there are just five of us left…in the whole world.' Aski closed the book, turning to the others. In his hand he held the map, the co-ordinates to the place the earth maiden was supposed to be, the last place the black angel knew her to be. 'We have a destination' he told them. 'There is no use for us to stay her any longer.'

‘Shouldn’t we rest first?’ Gael asked. ‘We’ve not had food nor sleep in…’
‘No’ Jaspin spoke loudly. ‘We leave now.’

Chapter Twenty Three
Sanctuary

They flew for hours, even though everyone was exhausted, stopping only when Lilith could no further. They came to rest on the peak of a mountain.
‘I'm sorry’ Lilith whispered, sitting hugging herself as her body trembled. ‘I don’t want to be a burden for you.’
‘You are not a burden to us’ Reuben told her calmly. ‘Not before, and especially not now since we have learnt that we are all that is left.’
Lilith raised her eyes to him. He like the other angels was tired and hungry, though unlike Lilith he still had the strength to carry on if he must. Like the others.
He smiled to Lilith wearily; Lilith turned her gaze away from him, and towards Jaspin, who sat away from them.
Since they had taken flight, he had not said a single word. They had rested here on this peak for hours, and still he had not spoken.
He was as he had been before.
‘What's wrong?’ Lilith uttered as she stared at him. He sat with his back to her on the edge of the cliff, legs dangling over the sheer drop.
‘He is in mourning’ Gael told her in a hushed voice. ‘He was like this before. Last time…he was silent for months.’
‘That black angel, who lived in the study’ Aski said, ‘must have been a very dear friend to him indeed.’
‘Who did he grieve for before?’ Lilith wondered aloud.
‘The female black angel’ Reuben told her quietly. ‘Seaden.’
‘Yes’ Lilith mumbled. ‘I remember. He mentioned her before.’
Jaspin she thought. *You are a puzzle indeed.*
‘Maybe’ Gael suggested, ‘you can get him to speak again….if you go over to him.’
‘I could do that?’ she echoed. ‘But why?’
‘He loves you’ Reuben told her, ‘as he loved Seaden. You two are bound together. Go’ he ushered. ‘Speak to him. Mend his aching heart.’
Lilith rose uncertainly to her feet, trying to ignore the other angels as they watched her expectantly.
She moved away from them, stepping lightly through the valley of jagged rocks and towards Jaspin.
He turned to her as she sat beside him, hanging her legs over the drop as he did.
She smiled as he watched her with a stony expression.
‘Speak to me’ she asked him. ‘Please…’
His expression changed then. His body seemed to relax, and he broke into a smile.

‘Lilith’ he said reaching for her, placing his hand on the back of her head and resting his forehead against hers. ‘Are you worried for me?’
‘Of course I am’ she told him, voice breaking as she blinked back tears.
‘Don’t be’ he said reassuringly. ‘I am fine,’ he closed his eyes content, ‘because of you.’
He slowly drew his hand back, leaning away again and turning to face the sky before them.
Lilith watched him closely, silent for several minutes, before speaking.
‘What was Seaden to you?’ Lilith asked him tentatively.
‘Like a sibling’ Jaspin replied without pause. ‘She was like my little sister, and treated me like I was her older brother….’ he smiled again, eyes beginning to shimmer. ‘I loved her…dearly.’
Lilith stared at him wide eyed.
‘I know how you must feel’ she said. ‘The only person I ever truly cared about was my grandmother, and she died so soon after I first met her.’
‘No’ Jaspin said. ‘You don’t know how I feel. Seaden and I had a special bond, stronger than any natural bond. We could *feel* one another, and the longer we were together, the stronger the bond grew.’ Jaspin bowed his head. ‘When she died…I feel like a lost a large piece of myself, a piece of my very soul.’ He clenched his fists. ‘She died a long time ago, yet the pain is only now just beginning to ebb away, since I met you’ he said, turning to Lilith. ‘You are healing me Lilith’ Jaspin told him, ‘the more time I spend with you’ Jaspin said, ‘the more my heart is mending.’ He smiled. ‘Thank you.’
Lilith didn’t answer.
‘The longer we stay together’ Jaspin told her, ‘the stronger our bond will become. I know we are bound, I am the weapon, and you are the shield, but I will do everything I can to protect you. I love you Lilith. I love you.’
‘I love you too’ Lilith replied. ‘Jaspin.’

Hours later, when the five angels were rested, they set off again, flying to their destination where the earth maiden was last known to be. As Lilith soared through the air, she saw the temple coming into view. It was a large grey building built outwards, the back of which was set against the rocky cliff that overlooked it. There were rivers which ran and trees which grew between the buildings, looking as if the structure had been built around the land, instead of over it. The tallest part of the building in the middle, where there was a great hall, was topped with a wide conical. At one side of the building, was a massive round stained glass window, intricately and painstakingly designed with a depiction of a meadow filled with flowers, their multicoloured leaves blowing in the wind with the tall grass.
The angels began to descend. Lilith tilted her wings as the ground drew closer to her.
She landed lightly, straightening up. Around her the other angels were doing the same, sighing with relief at finally landing. They were all exhausted, having not eaten or slept in over a day.
The five angels clung together in the courtyard. There were many levels around them, the higher levels holding beds of flowers and square fountains where water ran freely.
As Lilith listened to the gentle flow of the water, she noticed then a figure watching them. Around her, the other angels had noticed too. They all watched this figure as the figure watched them.

‘A holy woman’ Lilith realised, seeing the white robes that the woman wore, the blue sash around her waist, and her hair covered.
She turned to the side, seeing another figure, then another, and another.
A crowd was beginning to slowly gather, drawing closer to them gradually. Men and women of varying ages, all dressed in the same clothes worn by those who were blessed.
Lilith at first began to feel a little nervous, until she realised that the people stared not with fear or revulsion, but with admiration.
‘What are they doing?’ Lilith asked in a whisper.
‘They are worshipping us’ Gael told her.
He turned away from her, towards a young woman who approached. She reached out towards him as she came closer, her hands running down his light blue wings.
Lilith felt something touch her own wings. She turned, to see a man dressed in white had touched her. She watched him, and he reached for her again, caressing her wings.
It felt strange to be touched this way, foreign.
Many began to gather around Jaspin, and he stretched his wings out further, so that people could see them, touch them, feel his feathers.
‘It’s alright’ Aski told Lilith. ‘They won’t hurt you.’
‘How can they worship us?’ Lilith asked him. ‘I thought we were considered an abomination.’
‘Not in all places’ Reuben told her. ‘Not here.’
One of the women drew closer to Lilith still, reaching out to touch her face.
Gael spoke to one of the men near him. ‘Food’ he said. ‘Sleep.’
‘Come with us’ the holy man said to them. ‘We will give you food and a place to stay.’
‘Keep your wings out’ Jaspin mumbled to Lilith as he walked past her, following the holy men and women as they were led to another place.
Lilith’s wings brushed the walls and ceiling of the corridors as they went.
Along the way, more began to follow them on the ground, and in the windows above them when they stepped out into a larger hall, people stood waiting for them, watching, as whispers of *angel* and *holy being* travelled throughout the temple.
The five angels were led to an open hall, where there were many large platforms with soft floors and massive cushions which covered them. Golden curtains covered one wall, before which was a little pool of water in a shallow basin, where the water was almost still. The flow was gentle.
‘This way’ said one of the holy men, leading them to one side of the room where there was a great grey stone slab that acted as a table. A deep blood-red cloth had been laid over it, and little candles flickered in the centre.
‘Please sit’ the man said to them as several other holy figures carried simple wooden benches into the room and placed them on either side of the long stone slab.
Jaspin was the first to sit, stretching his wings out wide, before drawing them close to him again, relaxing his body. His wings remained.
Around him the other angels took their seats. Lilith sat opposite him, shifting tentatively, resting with her hands on her lap. She raised her head to glance at Jaspin opposite her. He gave her a flickering smile, before turning away again.

‘You must be exhausted’ one of the holy woman said to them. ‘You all look like you’ve gone without food and rest for far too long.’
‘It’s true’ Gael turned to her. ‘Our journey has been long…’
‘Eat’ the holy woman said to him, reaching forward tentatively and brushing his shoulder, before drawing back again. ‘Sleep.’ She said. ‘Rest.’
She drew back, and hurried away.
Around them some the holy figures bustled around, while some of the others simply watched.
The angels sat in silence for no more than a minute, before the food was brought to them. Large plates stacked with an array of foods from every corner of the map. From spiced meats from the hot plains to the south, to the succulent fruits that grew on mountain tops on the icy peaks in the north. Many temples always had vast amounts of food on hand, and this temple they had come to, was a larger one.
‘Why do they all want to touch us?’ Lilith asked Jaspin in a quiet voice as the food was placed before them. The holy figures retreated now, though they still watched from a distance.
‘They believe we are holy’ Jaspin replied. ‘If they touch us, then they are blessed.’
‘Don’t worry about it’ Aski told her, as Reuben beside him began to eat as fast as he could, reaching for anything edible in his vicinity. ‘Just enjoy the food.’
Lilith hesitated; staring at the plates piled high.
‘It’s alright’ Jaspin told her.
‘What if they betray us?’ Lilith asked him.
‘I trust them’ he told her. ‘You trust me.’ He smiled. ‘Eat.’
‘But what about the earth maiden?’
‘We will find her’ Reuben said. ‘But we must care for our bodies first, and fulfil our needs. We cannot find her if we are weak.’
Lilith reached for the plate nearest her, and began to eat.
When they had all finished, the food was taken away, and the five angels moved to the soft platforms covered with cushions and lay down to rest.
‘Relax’ Jaspin told Lilith, as he lay down beside her. ‘I’ll be here.’
Lilith curled up upon the cushions, hugging one of the green cushions to her and sighing.
She closed her eyes.

She slept deeply, and peacefully. Twitching occasionally as she rested, her wings moved gently on their own as she dreamed.
She woke many hours later, opening her eyes, and blinking.
She closed her eyes, breathing a heavy sigh and stretching, opening her eyes again and sitting up.
Around her the other angels continued their slumber, wings still visible, and beside her, Jaspin’s breath was slow.
Lilith gazed down at him, smiling warmly. He looked so peaceful as he slept, so tranquil and serene.
Lilith felt a surge of love towards him then, before turning away, and rising to her feet.
The room around them was utterly still. It was dark now, the lanterns hanging from gold chains from the ceiling were lit now, their flames burning brightly.

Lilith stepped off the platform, and onto the level ground, curling her wings around her body. She walked away from the angels, moving off on her own.
The place was deserted. Nothing moved around her.
Lilith's steps were light, and she drifted silently through the halls and corridors, coming eventually to an open garden where the stars shone down upon her from the heavens above.
Lilith tilted her head back, gazing at the blanket of stars that twinkled over her. She listened the gentle sound of trickling water nearby.
'Such a beautiful world' Lilith whispered, 'so vast….'
Lilith looked ahead then, heart jumping slightly as she realised she was not alone after all.
A woman approached her, body hunched over and head covered by a hood.
She shuffled closer to Lilith.
'I'm sorry' the stranger whispered, bowing submissively, 'when I heard of your arrival…I had to come here…'
'Do I know you?' Lilith asked the woman.
'N-no' the woman replied. She shuddered in the cool night around her. 'I came….' she said, '…for you…'
The woman straightened slightly. It was then that Lilith noticed she carried a bundle.
'My child' the woman mumbled, tears welling in her eyes. 'He's sick.'
Lilith looked down at the bundle as the woman revealed it.
It was a little boy.
'Does he have *the sickness*?' Lilith asked him.
'No' the woman shook her head. 'Poor baby……it's another illness, an illness that took my last child…naught but a few years ago….at the age.' She began to tremble then, tears running down her cheeks. 'He has a fever…' the woman continued, '…and all the same symptoms as my child before…before…..she died….'
The woman raised her head.
'Please save him.'
'How can I?'
'Bless him…' the woman begged her. '…Please…'
'I don't know how.'
'Just a touch' the woman uttered. 'That's all it takes.'
Lilith stared at the woman for a moment, before her eyes travelled back down to the little boy she held. He was utterly still. Lilith could see his breathing was shallow.
She reached towards him, touching his forehead with her fingertips. He was indeed hot, his skin burned.
Lilith kept the contact for a moment, the woman staring down at her son with wide eyed, before withdrawing.
The woman let out the breath she had been holding.
'Thank you' she said in a hushed voice to Lilith. 'Thank you….'
She made to turn away, pausing for a moment and glancing back at Lilith one last time.
'Your wings by the way…' she said, '…they're beautiful…'
She turned and hurried away.
Lilith watched her go, turning when she heard a faint noise behind her, the sound of wings when they beat the air, feeling the sudden downdraft of wind.

‘Jaspin’ she said.
‘Lilith.’
They stood side by side, staring out onto the silent garden. Three white wings, and one black. The sky was just beginning to lighten above them, as the sun slowly began to rise.
‘Can anyone recover from the sickness?’ Lilith asked him.
‘No’ Jaspin replied. ‘Once you show the first symptoms of the sickness…its already too late….only the earth maiden could….could….’ he bowed his head, holding his chin as he thought silently to himself. ‘We have to find her soon’ he mumbled, but he spoke more to himself now than he did Lilith.
Lilith was hardly listening to him now. Her mind was far away, and she thought of that woman and her child.
I hope he makes it she thought. *I hope he will be alright….*

The other angels when Lilith returned to the hall in which they slept were gone.
‘Don’t worry’ Jaspin reassured her. ‘They're about…somewhere…’
He turned to her then, and spoke to her.
‘Are you happy Lilith?’
‘Yes’ she replied. ‘It feels good to finally shed this veil’ she said, ‘and show people who I truly am, and not what they want or expect me to be. I don’t care if people worship or ridicule me. From now on, I am an angel.’
Jaspin watched her closely as she spoke, turning away when she had fallen silent.
‘Those are wise words’ he grumbled. ‘We should not hide who we truly are.’
Sometime later, and the sun rose.
The holy men and women of the temple began to emerge, and those who were simply visitors to the church, began to gather in mass.
Whispers of ‘angel’ and ‘holy relic’ seeped through the crowd. Lilith walked through the throng of people, feeling their hands as they reached out to touch her wings. Here they worshiped her, loved her, as they did the other angels.
One of the women suddenly called out, pointing to the roof of the temple. The heads of the people turned towards the figure that sat upon the roof. Here they saw the figure of Reuben sitting on the roof, his burnished gold wings glistening in the early morning light. On the other rooftop opposite him, was Gael, standing on the edge and leaning over the courtyard, his light blue wings spread wide around him. Aski, with his steely silver wings, moved upon the ground through the crowd, and Jaspin, standing at the head of the courtyard, curled his wings around him. One white and one black. Upon his face painted in thick black lines were divine markings, drawn on him by the holy figures around him.
The people in the courtyard all knelt, bowing their heads to the angels around them.

Chapter Twenty Four
The Beacon

‘We thank you for all you’ve done for us’ Jaspin said to the holy man. ‘But we’ve stayed already for far too long. We have to find the earth maiden’ he told him.

‘And you believe she can cure this world of the sickness?’ the holy man asked.
‘I hope so’ Jaspin bowed.
The holy figure nodded to him. ‘I am sure you will succeed’ he said. ‘I feel it in my heart.’ He sighed. ‘We will be sad to see you go.’
‘I know, but we all must move on.’
‘I know’ the figure nodded.
A short time later, the five angels were gathered outside the temple, walking away from it and towards the open plains.
As they went, Lilith glanced to the side. In the gardens that grew outside temple she saw a woman, by her side, holding her hand, was a little boy. The boy was smiling and waving at the angels, his skin was healthy and he seemed happy. His mother beside him smiled too. She raised her hand, waving at Lilith. Lilith nodded back in acknowledgment.
‘That’s the woman with the sick child’ Jaspin murmured back to Lilith. ‘Isn't it.’
‘Yes’ Lilith replied. ‘It is.’
The small group of angels slowed to a stop. Lilith still did not take her eyes away from the mother and child.
‘Perhaps…’ Lilith mumbled almost to herself, ‘we *are* blessed after all.’
She beat her wings, crouching and leaping into the sky. She followed the other angels across the sky, leaving on the ground the crowd of holy figures that watched them growing smaller, as they soared between the clouds.
The holy figures had told the angels where the earth maiden was likely to be, and now they flew to their new destination.
In a few short hours, they had reached the new temple, many miles across the map. The angels had soared over lakes and mountains and rolling plains. Now they descended, touching their feet to the ground once more.
‘You're growing stronger’ Jaspin noted as Lilith straightened. ‘You don’t seem to be tired.’
Lilith turned to him, smiling silently.
She faced ahead again, as they were approached by holy figures from the temple.
‘I see you’ve arrived’ the first holy man said. ‘We thought you might be here soon.’
‘Why’ Jaspin asked the man. ‘How did you know we were arriving?’
‘The earth maiden told us’ the man replied simply.
‘The earth maiden?’ Jaspin’s eye lit up at that. ‘She’s here?’
The other angels behind him became excited, all save for Lilith. She appeared only to be curious.
‘Yes’ the holy figure that had spoken bowed. ‘Indeed she is. She is here and she is waiting for you.’
‘We have to see here’ Jaspin pressed. ‘Where is she?’
‘If you would like to follow us’ the holy figure bowed to Jaspin again, ‘it’s right this way.’
The small group of holy figures, five in number, led the way through the temple. This temple was built against the rocky mountains on a relatively flat piece of earth. On one side was a great wall of grey rock, on the other, the vast world that stretched far beneath them.
The angels walked in a line behind the small group of holy figures that led them. Lilith, who walked at the back of the line, noticed several more holy figures join them as they went, walking after her.

She glanced forward again as they went, seeing a great archway before them, beyond which was a stairs that led downwards. Above the archway, was stained glass with the depiction of a pale blue sky and clouds.
The five angels, led and followed by the holy figures descended the stairs, moving further down and into the mountain itself.
It soon became dark around them as the natural light from the day became lost to them. The stairs were now lit by burning torches fixed to the walls.
'How deep are we heading?' Jaspin asked the others in a low voice.
'It's not far now' the holy man replied. 'Just a moment…'
They finally reached the bottom of the stairs, where there were a set of tall double doors, made of dark and heavy wood, held together by thick studs running over the doors.
The holy figures opened the doors. It took four men to do so. And the angels stepped in.
Inside was an empty hall, circular, with tiny windows above them to let in a little natural light. The windows ran all around them in a circle, lighting up the plain floor at their feet in little patches of white.
'Wait here' one of the holy men said to Jaspin, who glanced behind him as the thick doors were shut after them. 'We will get the earth maiden. She would be sleeping now.'
Jaspin gave a single nod, and the figure moved off.
The five angels waited now in the centre of the hall, as the other holy figures that had come waited in the edges in shadow.
Behind Jaspin, Lilith shifted, scratching at her arm and gazing about her at the tiny windows of light above them.
It was a nice day outside, the wind had been still, even this high up in the mountains.
Lilith longed to feel the warm sun again.
She looked back down, waiting patiently with the other angels as the silence dragged on. Reuben and Aski and Gael beside her stood still, never moving, only staring at the door through which the holy man had gone.
He returned, walking after him, was a woman.
She approached the five angels, slowing to a stop before them.
The five angels watched her closely.
She looked to be about twenty three in age, with short blonde hair. She wore a gold bar around her neck like a collar, and around each of her wrists were the similar gold bars. From each wrist and going to her collar, were three thin chains. From her neck and attached to the gold collar, was a necklace, of two snakes intertwined, their tails formed a downwards point like that of a spear.
She wore a green top, a long purple skirt, and a black shawl around her waist.
Jaspin considered her.
'I am who you seek' the woman said.
'You are not her' Jaspin instantly replied.
'Excuse me?'
Jaspin glanced behind him, noticing suddenly that the holy figures stood before the closed door.
He glanced back at the woman.
'I said you are not her' Jaspin replied.

‘Why would you say that?’ the woman asked him.
‘You don’t feel right’ Jaspin replied simply. Around him the other angels were silent, but it was clear from their expressions that they agreed, even Lilith somehow felt what he spoke was true.
The woman stepped back.
‘Do you not accept me?’ she asked.
‘I do not accept you’ Jaspin told her.
‘Do you reject me?’
‘I do reject you.’
The woman narrowed her eyes. She was angry.
‘You want nothing to do with me?’ she asked them one last time.
‘Correct’ Jaspin replied. ‘I want nothing to do with you. You are not who we seek. You are false. You are an imposter.’
The woman watched him closely, as if waiting for something else. When nothing came, she spoke again.
‘Very well’ she said. ‘Then here is where you will stay.’
She stepped back sharply as the holy figures all around them drew forth weapons that were hidden beneath their cloaks. Lilith gasped, the others tensed. Only Jaspin did not seem surprised.
‘Stay behind us’ Gael told Lilith.
‘It’s no use’ Jaspin snapped back. ‘She is already bound to me.’
‘Do you plan to kill us?’ Aski snarled to the false maiden, stepping forward.
‘You will not leave this place’ the woman told them, lifting her chin and gazing down at them. ‘Here is where you will stay. Today, tomorrow, now, and forever.’
Jaspin glanced up to the ceiling above them, the room that was below the rock.
‘You plan to keep us here?’ Jaspin whispered dangerously. ‘You plan to imprison angels beneath the earth? I would rather die than be trapped like this.’
He cast his hand out in an instant. The false maiden shrieked as a bolt of what looked like blue lightning shot her way. She fell back, landing on her side she whipped her head back towards the angels, as the holy figures that surrounded them, raised their weapons.
One of them fired, as Jaspin cast out his wings, the bolt from the crossbow struck him on the shoulder, but it was Lilith who screamed as she felt the pain from the injury tearing through her.
She fell forwards onto a knee, looking up fearfully at Reuben who stood beside her. His expression was that of fear, but there was defiance there also.
‘You will not keep us here!’ Reuben barked, addressing the entire room around them. ‘We won’t let you!’
As he spoke, his golden wings erupted from his back, Aski’s silver ones came forth also, and Gael’s silver ones.
On the ground Lilith forced herself to rise, standing tall now, as she called to her, her pure white wings.
Jaspin was the first to charge forwards as he made a break for the door, casting his magic out as he did. But his spell had little effect on the thick wood. If he had more time, perhaps he

could have broken through. But the holy figures either side of him attacked, each slashing at him, and cutting at his arms and shoulders.
Behind him, Lilith moaned, as blood blossomed on her own shoulders.
Reuben, Aski and Gael shot in three different directions, flying outwards and attacking the holy men that surrounded them. The holy figures fought back.
Lilith remained in the centre of the room, trying to ignore the pain from the injuries she had inherited from Jaspin. She winced again, as she felt a cut on her thigh, recognising the warm trickle down her leg as blood beginning to flow.
I have to do something she thought. *This is getting out of hand.*
It was then that she noticed the false maiden was gone.
She felt a twinge in her heart.
She looked up at the ceiling, eyes wide. She ground her teeth, flinching as she felt a punch to her gut. Lilith beat her wings, rising up in the air. She did not have the power to fight, not since she had been bound to Jaspin. She had lost that ability. Now she was only his shield, destined to suffer all his wounds. But she still had some power left in her, some abilities.
She could not fight, but could still protect.
She grabbed one of the little windows that circled around them in the ceiling above, gripping the edges hard, until her hands shook, and her fingers bled.
She gritted her teeth, pulling hard at the rock until her nails began to break. She grimaced, ignoring the pain as she suffered another one of Jaspin's injuries.
She screamed in defiance as she pulled the rock from its place, tearing a hole in the stone large enough to crawl through, groaning in agony as pain shot through her arms, the magic tearing at her flesh. Her magic. A part of her she did not know existed until now.
She pulled the rock from its place, holding onto the edge with one hand, she turned back to the other angels fighting below her, calling out to them.
They all looked up from the ground, Jaspin whipped around.
Lilith crawled through the hole, and out into the open world. Behind her, Reuben, Gael and Aski leapt into the air, the beat of their wings caused a strong wind left behind them. They flew up into the air, chasing after Lilith as she fled into the open world.
Jaspin left behind wheeled around, taking in the faces of the holy men that surrounded them, then looking at last to the false maiden, who stood at the far end of the room, hidden in the shadows.
Her expression conveyed nothing of her emotions as she looked back at him. He beat his wings, again and again until he began to rise; reaching for the gap in the ceiling above them, the hole Lilith had created.
He did not spare any of them a second glance, as he escaped into the free sky above, following after the other angels, away, and safe.

The five of them flew over the world for hours without rest, coming to land at last at an unremarkable location. Somewhere far away from any town, city or village, somewhere deep within the wilderness. Somewhere where no one would find them.
Jaspin was the last to land. By the time he touched the ground, the other angels, Reuben, Gael and Aski, were surrounding Lilith who knelt between them, body hunched over.

Jaspin himself was completely unharmed, and bore no injury at all. The ones he had received, he had given all to Lilith.
‘Are you alright?’ he asked Lilith tentatively.
She raised her head up at him, smiling.
She bled from the shoulder where the crossbow bolt had hit, there were deep gashed across her arms and shoulders, smothered by blood which had since dried and crusted. The reason some of her wounds still bled however, was because the beat of her wings kept the wounds open as she flew. There was also an injury to her thigh, and there were burns on her arms where the magic had torn at her flesh as she fought against the stone.
‘I'm sorry this has to happen to you’ Jaspin told her, sounding genuinely distressed by this. ‘I wish there was another way.’
He sat with her a short time later, having sent the other angels away. It was just himself and Lilith.
‘I wish this had not happened’ he spoke softly to her, holding her hands in his and running his fingertips along hers, seeing her broken and bloody nails. ‘I never wanted to be bound to you…I knew it would only cause you pain.’
‘It doesn’t matter’ Lilith replied carelessly. ‘What's done is done.’
Jaspin raised his head to hers.
‘At least now’ Lilith told him, ‘I am not alone.’

The five of them travelled on foot from there, heading in no particular direction. They were safe now, the people that wished to cause them harm had no chance of finding them here, and so they walked at a leisurely pace.
Moving in a small band, each thinking about how tired and hungry they were, they soldiered on in silence, travelling for several hours without rest, until something happened.
All at once, the five angels whipped around, all staring in the same direction, off to the west.
They stared this way for several seconds, sensing a presence, feeling a being call out to them.
Lilith was the only one to talk.
‘Is it her?’
One after the other, and without further explanation, the five angels summoned their wings, climbing higher into the air with every beat; they flew in a straight line towards this ‘beacon’, this thing that called out to all of them.
She wanted to be found.

Chapter Twenty Five
Ena

The angels flew towards the signal, answering the call.
They came to land at last, in a strange place. It was a single establishment, made of several different buildings; it was like a small town in itself.
The night was wearing on, and as the five of them drew closer to the dark buildings built outwards instead of upwards, they saw the place before them. It was lit by many lamps

hanging from chains and hooks all around the place, between the buildings, the open corridors, lighting the top of stairs that descended into the earth.
The five of them landed in a small courtyard, and without pause, headed forwards.
There were people about them as they made their, but each of the five angels ignored all other people, their attention given only to this signal, burning brightly in their conscious.
None of the five saw much of the building around, and only barely registered the people. They came to the spot that called them, coming to a large empty room, the walls the same dark shade as the rest of the buildings around them.
The five angels stood in a circle facing inwards and staring at the ground at their feet.
'Down' Reuben spoke aloud. 'She's below us.'
They split up, searching for a way to reach her, all of them completely silent. Two of them found the top of the stairs, retreating to find the others; they descended into the lower ground.
Lilith glanced above her nervously as they went below ground, remembering what had happened last time. But she couldn't deny that it felt different this time. Whatever she was feeling, it was the same as what the others felt.
She followed after them.
Reuben led the way, guiding them into what looked at first glance to be a dining hall. Lilith observed the surroundings briefly and the people within, she saw that this place they had come to was a place of healing of some sorts. Many here were dressed in the same simple white, others showed visible injury.
Lilith's attention snapped forwards again, ignoring the silent hush that swept through the hall that was once noisy and bustling, she stared towards the front of the hall, where Reuben was leading them.
They slowed to a stop as they reached one of the figures, the one that had been giving off the signal; the beacon that had led them here.
She sat on one of the benches facing them; sitting with her head bowed and hands in her lap.
The five angels, their wings receded now, stood in a half-circle around her, attention fixed all on her, as a result, everyone else in the hall stared at her too now.
The figure was a girl.
She raised her head, looking at each of them with a blank expression. And then she smiled.
'You found me.'
She rose to stand, reveal the fact that she was abnormally tall and skinny. She was taller than all the angels, taller than everyone else in the room. She wore a simple dress, white and modest. Her straight hair grew long, reaching her ankles and was coloured pale green, left to hang as it did, not tied or held by anything but let to fall free. Her skin was pale, and her eyes sunken.
She looked sick.
'I knew you'd find me' she spoke quietly.
Gael let out a sob, overcome with emotions; he clapped his hand over his mouth to control himself. Around him, all the other angels were grinning widely, all except for Lilith.
She glanced at them, almost hearing their thoughts.
We've found her!
They were overcome with joy. That much was obvious.

The tall figure looked over the heads of the other angels, and to Lilith, who stood a step back from the others.
'Approach me' the tall figure commanded her.
Lilith stepped forward, instantly obeying her, though she wasn't sure why.
She stood before the figure, looking up to her.
The earth maiden raised her hand, running her slender fingers softly over Lilith's hair, then down her shoulder and body.
'You've been injured' is all she said, and nothing more.
Lilith blinked several times, experiencing a strange sensation coursing through her, a physical sensation, a comforting one. Her body felt hot, and then cold, and then she felt nothing.
She looked down at herself, gasping slowly in shock and awe as she saw her own body.
The wounds that she had suffered, were all gone.
The tall figure smiled kindly down at her.
'You can call me Ena' the figure said. 'I am the earth maiden.'

She slept in her own bed that night, the angels stayed awake, sitting on the rooftop and watching the moon.
The next morning, when the sun was up, Ena left her room, dancing through the garden of the place, with the angels trailing after her. She turned once as she went, swinging her arms out and skipping along, her long pale green hair being caught and tangled in the bushes that she passed.
'Ena?' Jaspin spoke up.
She paused then, turning to him. 'I have many names' she told all of them. 'Ena is one of them. Only you five angels can call me Ena. I know there are only you who are left.' She smiled then, giggling behind her hand. My family call me Kyrah, the holy figures call me Lotus, and everyone else calls me Zen.' She straightened, holding her hands behind her back. 'You can call me Ena.'
'Ena' Jaspin said, stepping forward. 'What happened to your face?'
Ena raised her hand to her cheek, where there was a bruise.
'Some of the other girls don't like that I am different.'
A flicker of anger crossed Jaspin's face then. He cracked his knuckles.
'Do you want me to deal with them?' he asked.
'No' Ena shook her head. 'I can look after myself. I don't need other people to speak up for me. I have a voice of my own.'
She stepped back, tilting her head to the sky.
'I like this garden' she said. 'It's tranquil.' She gazed about, taking in every detail of the place around her, its trees with their lush green leaves swaying in the wind, its flower beds overflowing with colour. 'I want to travel' she said out of the blue. 'I want to see the world, and I want to return to my family. It's been far too long since I last saw them.'
Lilith, who stood in the small group amongst the other angels, smiled to herself, crossing her arms. *She wants to travel* she thought to herself with amusement. *Just like the others when I first met them……she wants to see the world.*

A short while later, once Ena had soaked up the sun, they left the gardens and went to the stables.
‘This is my horse’ Ena said to them, stroking the neck of a modest-sized dappled mare with a white mane and tail. The horse was a very beautiful one, looking like it belonged to a princess, with its white saddle and gold-laced white bridle and reins. ‘Her name is Vanity. She is my pride and joy.’
‘Where are we going?’ Aski spoke to her eagerly.
‘I will decide’ Ena said to her, turning to the saddle.
She put her foot in the stirrup and mounted, sweeping her long hair back and out of the way. She looked very natural and comfortable seated in the saddle.
‘Aren’t you going to say goodbye?’ Jaspin asked her. ‘Aren’t you going to tell anymore you're leaving?’
‘There is nothing here I care about’ Ena answered shortly, before tapping her heels lightly in the horse’s flank and trotting off.
‘Where does she think she’s going?’ Lilith mumbled to Jaspin.
‘I've no idea’ he spoke in a distant voice. ‘But we have to go with her.’

The little horse was faster than it first looked to be, racing across the landscape and away from the place they had found her, the small city, the temple; the houses of healing.
Ena travelled her own way, her long pale green hair whipping in the air behind her, and above, the angels flew back and forth overhead, always sticking close to her, always in sight.
She rode for some time, the angels never landed as she sent her horse into a canter, slowing down when the animal grew tired, before urging it onwards again at high speed.
They came at last to a place far away, a secluded place, where no one would ever go.
Ena guided her horse up the rocky slope of the hill, the angels circling like crows overhead as they watched over her. She soon became lost beneath the blanket of trees, but the angels were not worried. They could still sense her.
She became visible again seconds later, stepping out in a clearing where the grass was healthy and tall, and a waterfall constantly spewed water of the cliff nearby, the sound of falling water never-ending.
Ena dismounted Vanity, and the angels descended, one by one landing around her, as the horse bowed its head to eat the grass and drink from the river.
‘What have we come here for?’ Reuben asked her, as his gold wings receded into his back. ‘Is this place familiar to you?’
‘I come here sometimes’ Ena spoke in a distant voice as she reached up to touch some of the low hanging flowers in the trees, ‘when things get difficult for me. It’s not been easy. But here is my solace.’
‘Why don’t you heal yourself?’ Lilith spoke up, moving forwards slowly. ‘Like you did me?’
Ena lowered her hand from the tree, weaving her fingers together and holding them over her heart as she bowed her head.
‘I…’ she began. ‘I…’ she giggled then, turning to face them and raising her head. ‘It’s going to be my birthday soon’ she told them eagerly, casting her arms out. ‘I’m going to be fifteen in a few days. I want to reach my family before then.’

‘Fifteen?’ Lilith mumbled, taking in her height. She opened her mouth to speak, but decided against it. Something inside her told her that she should not ask, and so she didn’t.
Ena was only fifteen years old, and yet she was considerably taller than all of them.
Perhaps she has some condition Lilith thought. *She does look sick…I wonder…*
‘Why aren’t you with your family?’ Gael asked her.
There was a silence. As Lilith watched Ena closely, she had noticed the earth maiden stiffen slightly. It was ever so slight, she only just caught onto it, but it was there.
Ena turned her eyes slowly onto Gael, her face void of expression.
And then Gael suddenly hunched over, crying out in pain and clutching his chest.
The other angels stared wide eyed at him as he descended to his knee, bowing his head and groaning.
Lilith’s attention whipped back to Ena, and she realised wit shock.
She’s doing this!
Gael heaved then, throwing up blood.
‘You will not mention my family again’ Ena spoke to him evenly. There was no anger in her voice. There was no emotion of any kind. She was distant.
Gael raised his head up at her, still clutching his chest with both hands now, as his body began to tremble.
His eyes were pleading, begging for it to stop.
Lilith glanced fearfully from Gael to Ena, heart pounding in her chest. Around her the other angels looked tense, but they did not speak or intervene.
Lilith was about to speak up, to try to make her stop, when Gael suddenly slumped forward, body relaxed.
It was over.
A moment of hesitation passed. Reuben rushed up to him, grabbing him by the arm and pulling him to his feet. He checked over Gael quickly. He appeared to be ok.
Lilith giggled suddenly, hunching her shoulders with hands over her mouth, eyes shining playfully.
She pulled a little knife from her person, a thing she carried for practical purposes, and strode up to Jaspin.
She stabbed him hard in the shoulder, reaching his skin up to the hilt, before jerking the knife back.
Jaspin did not react, he did not feel the pain at all, and the other angels simply looked on.
Lilith shrieked then, stepping back, hand going to the wound she had given to Jaspin, that had appeared on her own shoulder.
She had come back to herself then, staring down at the seeping blood in horror, before turning wide eyed to look at Ena.
‘I think we should rest here together’ Ena said to all of them, as Gael gingerly wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth. ‘Tomorrow we will travel further. I want to see my family.’ She tilted her head to the sky with a smile. ‘It’s going to be a warm night together.’

As the sun began to dip, Lilith ventured off alone.
She sat on a rock crying silently now, hidden deep in the foliage some distance away, where she thought no one would find her.

She didn't know what had shaken her up so much about what had happened, but she was a mess inside.
Stop it she thought angrily to herself, glaring at her own shaking hands through teary eyes. *You're stronger than this…*
She heard a rustle in the bushes behind her and whipped around, sighing in relief at the sight of the figure.
'Jaspin' she breathed. 'It's you.'
'Why are you crying?' he asked her sombrely.
She turned away from him, mumbling. 'I'm fine.'
'That's not what I asked.'
He came to sit beside her on the rock, glancing her way.
'Are you afraid?' he asked her.
'Would it matter if I was?'
He reached his arm up, placing it around her shoulders and pulling her to him. She blinked in surprise at the act.
'Don't be afraid' Jaspin told her calmly.
'How could I not?' Lilith asked him pleading. She hugged herself then, feeling violated. 'I cannot believe this has happened to me' she whispered. 'How is it possible to control another being?'
'Ena is a good person' Jaspin said firmly to her.
'But look at what she did to Gael…' she whispered. 'Look at what he did to me…'
Jaspin bowed his head, holding her to him.
'You trust me don't you?' he said.
'Yes' she breathed.
'And you wouldn't doubt me would you?'
'No.'
Jaspin looked deeply into her eyes as she turned to face him. 'I trust Ena with all my being' he told her firmly. 'I love her. You feel the same way about her I know.'
'Yes' Lilith whispered. 'I sensed her, like the others did. I sensed her presence, and I feel the same love for her as I feel for you…but its ten times stronger.' She turned away from him then. 'But I feel fearful of her also' she added quietly, 'ten times stronger than I thought possible. She would hurt me' Lilith said, eyes twitching, 'she would kill me, and not bat an eyelid.'
'We need her' Jaspin simply said. 'We *need* her…'

Lilith sat alone with Ena shortly after. The earth maiden had sent all the others away to bring food and other supplies. She lay now against her dappled mare that rested upon the grass. Ena leant against the body, arm slung over the neck of the mare, as she rested contentedly.
Lilith shot a nervous glance her way. Ena lay there completely still, her modest white dress had a few grass stains at the knees, and her long pale green hair pooled on the floor beside her.
Lilith glanced up at the sky, wishing the others would come back soon. She let out a breath, leaning to the side and resting on the thick and tall grass. The earth was soft and warm beneath the sun.

She closed her eyes, and her mind slowly began to wander.

Lilith woke sometime later, opening her eyes with a gasp as she saw Ena leaning over her.
'Hello' Ena said. 'You look so peaceful when you sleep.'
Lilith lay where she was on her back, staring up at the earth maiden with the sky above.
Ena stepped back, allowing Lilith to sit up and turn to her.
'I can't wait for you to see my family' Ena said. 'They would be very excited to meet all of you.' She sat on the ground beside Lilith, leaning closer to her. 'You have pretty hair' she said to her. 'I've never seen a white so pure; and your wings too.' She grinned slyly then. 'The hybrid is impressive, but I like your wings the best.' She leant closer to Lilith, as she stared back in silence. 'I want us to be friends' Ena whispered to her. 'I truly do.' She reached for her then, wrapping her arms around her body and hugging her firmly, like a long lost sister. Her actions seemed genuine. 'Tell me about yourself' Ena began as she let go of her. 'I have a family. You must have one too.'
'Well' Lilith spoke quietly, feeling a little lost and uncomfortable but forcing herself to speak. 'I don't really know where to begin.'
'Let's begin with your mother and father. How did they meet?'
'I don't know.'
Ena faltered then, staring at Lilith hard. 'You don't get on with them do you.'
It was not phrased as a question, but a statement.
Lilith looked up at her, eyes wide.
Am I that easy to read?
'They hate me' Lilith breathed.

A short while later, Ena sat with her back to Lilith, picking the petals off a flower one by one.
'That is a beautiful horse' Lilith spoke up.
Ena glanced around towards her, giggling then.
'Vanity is my pride and joy.'
'How did you get her?'
'One day' Ena began dramatically, dropping the flower which was now only a stem and turning her body around to face Lilith, 'I saw a great flash of light in the distance. I was sleeping at the time, in my tower at the place where you found me. There was a comet, with a long straight white tail trailing through the sky. It hit the ground and there was a great explosion, but I was the only one to notice it. I climbed out of my bed and went down the tower, and out into the open night. I ran across the grasses and into the forest where I saw the comet hit. And there' she said, showing her palms dramatically, 'I saw it.'
'What did you see?'
'A holy white light' Ena breathed, 'and at its centre….was Vanity.' She cast a tender expression towards the sleeping mare.
'That is quite a tale.'
'Maybe you want to repay the favour' Ena instantly countered, pointing at Lilith's head. 'How did you get those scars on your face?'

Lilith touched the skin on her cheek then. The scars had become so 'normal' to her, had over the last few years felt like such a part of her, that she had completely forgotten they were there.
'I was attacked' Lilith spoke quietly. 'There was once a time I lived on the streets.'
'How old are you by the way?' Ena suddenly asked Lilith out of the blue.
'My age?' Lilith furrowed her brow then. 'Gods…I honestly don't even remember. I think I must be over thirty five now…' she went quiet then. 'I suddenly feel so old' she spoke forlorn. 'What have I done with my life?' she spoke to herself.
Ena watched her in silence for a few moments, before flopping to the side, landing with her head in Lilith's lap. Ena turned her head to the side, gazing up at Lilith with a smile upon her face.
Lilith felt a strong surge of love towards Ena then, an emotion that felt unnatural, almost as if she was *made* to feel this way because of her, was forced to.
Lilith held Ena's head tenderly, moving her hands slowly as she cupped her face. Ena lifted her chin, before relaxing again. Lilith bowed her head, her pure white hair falling about her face. She no longer tied her hair up like she did in the days when she worked in the pleasure house. She now always let her hair fall free, and it hung now.
Lilith closed her eyes, and Ena did the same. They rested there beside one another for some time, until the others returned.
Lilith opened her eyes, stiffening slightly as Reuben landed in the clearing, his beautiful golden wings glistening in the evening light, as they receded into his back. He turned towards Lilith and the earth maiden, grinning widely. In his hand he held a sack, striding towards them and placing it on the ground, he opened it, revealing inside there was food.
The three of them ate in silence. Ena was very meticulous, choosing to eat the fruit first before anything else. She ate very slowly, and only a small amount, before turning away from the others and going to sleep.
'Are you alright?' Reuben asked Lilith as Ena slept deeply beside them.
'I am well' Lilith replied evenly. 'Where are the others?'
'They should be back soon.'

Aski and Gael returned together shortly after, carrying blankets and more food.
Aski stood over Ena, placing the simple blanket over her as she slept, Ena didn't move, as Aski laid the thin blanket over her.
Ena sighed deeply, a slow smile spread across her face.
The other angels went to sleep, but Lilith stayed awake, gazing up at the sky now twinkling with stars. She waited for Jaspin, who took longer to return.
With his he carried oats for the horse, and simple boots and a cloak for Ena. But also he came bearing news.
'There are men swarming in the place we found the earth maiden' he told the others seriously. 'They are armed……holy men. The *false* one is with them. They are heading this way.'
'We should go' Lilith urged. 'We should get away as fast as possible.' she became suddenly very aware of the wound in her shoulder, the wound she had inflicted upon herself when under control of the earth maiden, she wound she had inherited when she had stabbed Jaspin.

Ena had refused to heal her, even though she had healed her once before from her other injuries.
Ena did not understand the earth maiden.
'We cannot leave' Reuben said, glancing towards the earth maiden who still rested. 'We should wait until morning at least.'
'They are heading this way' Jaspin repeated.
'They won't find us' Aski spoke with confidence. 'Not here. Not in the dark.'
Gael glanced from one to the other, listening to them speak and remaining silent.
'We'll go' Reuben said, 'at first light, but Ena' he said glancing toward her, '…she needs to rest.'
Shortly after, Lilith and Jaspin went away together. Gael stayed beside Ena as she slept, and Reuben and Aski flew overhead, sitting in the treetops and keeping a look out.
On more than one occasion, they dropped to the ground, cutting down more than one stray holy man, a scout it seemed, who drew dangerously close to their location.
When morning came, Jaspin fed Vanity the oats, giving the boots and cloak to Ena to wear.
'I don't want to leave' Ena told them when she was told of the situation. 'I'm not ready.'
'But…' Gael began uncertainly, 'they are coming this way.'
Ena turned her head towards him very slowly, speaking dangerously. 'Don't make me repeat myself' she said to him. 'We will go when I am ready.'
Gael blanched then, stepping back and bowing his head. 'I'm sorry' he whispered. '…Sorry…'

'Why doesn't she want to leave?' Lilith asked Jaspin when they sat alone together in the woods, separated from the others.
'I don't know' Jaspin mumbled back. 'I don't pretend to understand her.'
Lilith hugged her knees, staring at the ground miserably.
'You're upset' Jaspin said.
'I don't know' Lilith replied. 'My mind is so jumbled. I feel like my emotions are being warped, and I feel so scared.'
'You're scared to stay here?'
'Scared to stay, scared to go……scared to follow the earth maiden.' She pulled the grass at her feet. 'Despite anything else, I'm just glad to have you by my side.'
They heard a rustle in the leaves then, tensing as they saw a holy scout step out into the open.
Without hesitation, Jaspin rose, cutting the man down and killing him in one swipe.
Lilith watched without reaction at this. They left the place shortly after, returning to the place where the earth maiden was.
A short time later, another figure stepped forwards, into the place where the scout had been killed. The figure the angels referred to as *the false one*, stood over the dead man.
'They are close' she said. 'We have to find them. We have to get them away from *her*.'
She was surrounded by other holy figures that stood to protect her.
'We have to protect the angels'

Ena mounted Vanity then, who was laden now with the supplies the angels had brought.
'We have to travel swiftly' Jaspin said to her. 'They are close. Too close now.'

‘It’s that way’ Ena pointed, with no urgency in her whatsoever. ‘My family is that way.’
‘What do they want?’ Reuben asked, the question directed at no one in particular. ‘Why are they here?’
But no one knew the answer.
They left the clearing, walking alongside Ena away from the hill and out of the cover of the trees that sheltered them.
The angels that trailed after Vanity, glanced about them constantly as they went. After a time, Ena began to play.
The angels stopped to watch her as she began to play with her horse, Vanity beginning to prance around, paw the ground and trot in circles.
‘Ena’ Gael spoke tentatively, voice shaking as he looked behind them. ‘They're coming. We cannot waste time.’
Lilith’s eyes grew wide as she watched a small group of figures in the distance, standing just beyond the line of the trees they had emerged from. She couldn’t see them clearly, and wasn’t sure if they were heading their way. But there was no doubt these figures could see the angels and Ena, out in the open as they were.
Lilith’s heart skipped a beat.
‘We have to get rid of them’ Jaspin growled watching them. The angels stood in a row, all facing these figures, as behind them, Ena played with Vanity.
‘Ena?’ Reuben voiced, asking for conformation. But Ena wasn’t listening. Reuben turned away.
‘Do you think they wish to harm us?’ Aski wondered aloud.
‘I don’t know’ Jaspin shook his head. ‘It is likely; we have already killed some of their men.’
He glanced behind him towards Ena as she continued to trot in circles on her horse. ‘We must protect her’ he said. ‘Let us meet this foe.’
‘Stop!’ Ena barked suddenly as the angels released their wings. ‘I want Gael to stay here.’
Gael hesitated at her words, his wings receding into his back moments later, obeying her wish.
‘You should probably stay here too’ Jaspin said quietly to Lilith. ‘You cannot fight.’
‘Alright’ Lilith sighed unhappily. ‘I see your point.’
Jaspin nodded shortly to her, before turning away again, beating his wings. ‘I will try not to get injured, for your sake.’
He took off, followed seconds later by Reuben and Aski, as they called forth their gold and silver wings, led by the black and white angel, they soared through the air. Ena dismounted her horse.
‘They are beautiful’ Ena spoke distantly as she gazed towards them. ‘Are they not?’
She stood behind Lilith and Gael, holding the reins and watching the three angels fly away to meet the holy figures that pursed them.
‘Will they kill them?’ Lilith asked.
‘Most likely’ Gael mumbled.
‘But what if they mean us no harm?’ Lilith wondered.
‘Then they will not be chasing us’ Gael finished.

Chapter Twenty Six
Path of Flowers

They entered the woodland a short time later, and Lilith glanced above her towards the sky, wondering if the others would be able to find them, and worrying if they couldn't.
It had only been a short time, but already she missed then, Jaspin in particular.
Please she thought miserably. *Don't lose us.*
Ena walked beside Vanity now, leading the other angels onwards.
'Shouldn't we wait' Gael suggested. 'Shouldn't we stop here? The others might not be able to find us.'
'They will find me' Ena answered simply. 'And where I am, you will be.'
They walked in silence for several hours after that without rest. In this time, Lilith felt pains all over her body, experiencing it from time to time.
It's been hours Lilith worried. *And still they fight?*
She shivered then, groaning as she held her side. Blood began to slowly seem from a wound that ran across her ribs.
She felt a hand on her shoulder then, and turned to face Gael who watched her, an expression of concern worn on his face.
'Are you alright?'
'I'll be fine' she smiled weakly. 'Don't worry about me.'
'We should get you a new dress' Gael told her offhandedly, looking over her body at the tears and the blood soaked into the fabric. 'This one is damaged.'
'My mother makes the most fabulous dresses' Ena spoke back to Lilith. 'You will see her very soon. She will measure you, and make something specifically, just for you.' Ena's eyes glinted then, and she let out a small giggle. 'You're going to look beautiful again.'
'I do need to get out of the wilds' Lilith mumbled, feeling her greasy hair, feeling unclean and wishing to wash and wear a new change of clothes. 'I look forward to meeting your family.'
'They are wonderful people' Ena smiled kindly.

Jaspin cast his hand out, a sheet of light appeared in a point before him, shooting forwards and straight through the body of the holy man.
The holy figure, a man no older than nineteen, clutched at the hole in his chest, eyes wide with shock as he realised his life was over. Jaspin saw that same look in the man's eyes as he had seen in the eyes of the men he had killed before him. A look of despair and grief and fear. The man was not ready to die. None of the men he had killed were ready to face whatever came after death.
'Rest in peace' Jaspin mumbled over the body as it fell, sweeping his hand through the air and drawing a holy symbol as he whispered a prayer.
The man fell onto his back, gazing up at the sky with dead eyes, hands still over his chest, but with fingers now relaxed.

Beside Jaspin one of the other holy men leapt at Reuben who fought nearby, Jaspin was only vaguely aware of him, barely hearing Reuben's cry of pain as the holy man cut the flesh at his back, trying to cut at his wings.
Aski leapt forwards, killing the man that attacked Reuben in one strike.
Jaspin brought his hands closer to his body, wings rising high in the air, one jet black and shrouded in black smoke, the other pure white and shining in a blinding light.
Men fell around him, all of them that stood closest to him, save for Reuben and Aski.
'Enough!' came an order.
The angels looked around, seeing seated upon a tall black mare, the one they had come to know as the false one.
'I want no more bloodshed here' the 'other' one ordered the holy men, who seemed to be under her control.
They backed away, leaving behind the men that had fallen, scattered around Jaspin now in a broken circle. Reuben and Aski straightened, glaring at the figure on the horse. Mounted on stallions and positioned a few steps behind the false one, were other holy men. These were body guards that would follow her wherever she went, for as long as she would want them.
'Why?' the young woman spoke, sounding genuinely hurt, 'why do you reject me so?'
'You are not the one' Jaspin glowered at her. 'You are not the one.'
She let out a sigh then, sitting back and slumping in her saddle, head bowed.
'My name is Freya' she spoke to them quietly. 'I just thought you should know.'
Jaspin turned to her mutely, wiping a speck of blood from his cheek.
'I wish you no harm' Freya said to them. 'I know that may be hard to believe. I acted poorly before, but I was desperate, desperate to keep you from finding *her*.'
'Why?' Jaspin breathed.
'She is evil' Freya said, narrowing her eyes. 'She would cause unspeakable harm.'
'I will follow her' Jaspin spoke, 'wherever she goes. She will help us cure the world. This world is sick' he paused. 'You must know this.'
Freya clenched her jaw. She pulled her skirt back, showing the flesh on her knee, where the others saw a black mark, bold and large on her skin.
'I am dying' Freya whispered to them. 'I have only months to live. I want to cure the sickness in this world more than anyone. I don't want to die…..I am afraid.'
'What does that have to do with us?' Jaspin asked her coldly. 'If anything, you should be supporting us, especially since you are dying.'
'No' Freya shook her head. 'Because I have seen what she will do.'
'And what is that?' Reuben asked, unable to keep hold of his curiosity.
Freya stared down at him from where she sat upon her horse. But she said nothing. Perhaps she had decided she had said too much.
'You wouldn't believe me' she spoke, 'even if I were to tell you.'
'We are done here' Jaspin said backing away, but never taking his eyes from her. 'Stay away from us. Stay away from the earth maiden. We will protect her with our lives…with everything we have.'
Reuben and Aski stood beside him, silent as the grave. But as Freya looked into their eyes, she saw the truth of Jaspin's words. Reuben and Aski were willing to die for the earth maiden if need be, as would Jaspin himself.

‘Go’ Freya spoke quietly to the angels. ‘I will pursue you no longer, I will not harm you. It was never my wish to in the first place.’
‘Then what did you want?’
‘Only to protect you’ Freya replied to Jaspin.
Jaspin narrowed his eyes.
Freya watched him expectantly, but said no more
Jaspin turned his back to her, taking off and flying quickly away, returning to the earth maiden. He was followed immediately by Reuben and Aski.
‘But Freya’ one of the holy men spoke behind her. ‘We cannot let them go.’
‘I'm not’ Freya answered simply. ‘I will not.’ She watched the three angels fly away from her, soaring through the open sky. ‘But this is not the way.’ She turned behind her to the holy man that had spoken. ‘We will achieve nothing by force. We must be kind in our ways, gentle…’ she trailed off. ‘I have to be alone.’
‘You're too important to be left unguarded’ one of the holy men instantly told her.
‘I feel safe’ Freya told them. ‘The angels will not kill me.’
‘How do you know?’
‘Because…’ Freya said. ‘I have faith.’
She lifted the reins in her hands.
‘I have to reach the angels somehow’ she said. ‘I must. This is the most important thing of all. The angels are in danger…as are the rest of us.’
She tapped her heels into the horse, sending the mare forwards into a trot with a flick of the tail. The holy men hung back, watching as Freya left them, moving away to be alone. They cast their eyes down then upon the fallen men.
‘We should bury them’ one of them mumbled, as the others around him began to say their prayers, helping the spirits of the deceased to reach the afterlife in peace.
The men were buried, the fires burned in their place, lighting up the darkening sky, as the three angels flew over the land, searching for Ena who had travelled onwards.
Following after them, was Freya.
‘I have to find the angels’ she mumbled to herself in worry. ‘They are in danger.’

Ena giggled to herself, skipping forward and spinning as she moved. In her hand she held a vine, when they had rested earlier, she had pulled this vine from one of the trees that grew nearby, and to the vine; she had tied many flowers she had found that grew around them. And now, she danced with it, waving it in the air like a ribbon, twirling it and twisting it around her body. At last, she threw it up into the air, watching it being blown away by the wind, over the tops of the trees and out of sight.
She giggled again, hands going to her mouth and hunching her shoulder. She turned, facing the two angels that followed her now, Lilith walking one step behind, and Gael trailing after her, holding the reins of the horse Vanity.
‘It’s so wonderful to be found by all of you’ Ena said to them. ‘I know you five are the only ones left.’ She stopped then, bowing her head and holding her hands behind her back, appearing suddenly sad. ‘The others are dead’ she said. ‘I know this. It was the sickness that killed them…I know this.’
She raised her head then.

‘You want me to cure the sickness’ she spoke to Lilith and Gael who watched her silently. ‘I do not know for sure, but I believe I am capable of such a thing, but it would not be easy.’ She smiled then, giggling. She skipped up to Lilith, taking her by the hands and kissing her on the lips, before stepping back and gazing into her face with an expression of love. ‘I do not have a sister’ Ena said to Lilith. ‘You are like a sister to me, and I love you already. And you’ she spoke to Gael, standing beside her horse, ‘I feel a closer connection to you than the others.’ She moved away from Lilith, stepping closer to Gael.

She reached for him; Gael flinched, as her fingers hovered near his face, but she did not touch him, only smiled, and withdrew her hand.

‘We are nearly to my home now’ Ena said to him in a quiet voice. Her body tensed suddenly, growing excited now. ‘My family would be very excited to meet all of you’ she said. ‘The others too’ she said, ‘when they return.’

Lilith glanced to the sky again; something of a habit she had adopted in the time Jaspin had been absent. She worried now the others would struggle to find them. They had entered the forest, and had been travelling beneath the canopy of the leaves for several hours now, and the sky was only visible from time to time.

It had been a long while they had been separated.

‘I know you worry for them’ Ena said to Lilith, turning to her, ‘Jaspin especially. I know you love him. But do not worry.’ She giggled then. ‘They will be able to find me; I am like a beacon to them.’ She smiled widely. ‘You will both stay with me. The others will come back to me, and so Jaspin will be with you again. Both of you.’

She moved away, skipping as she went; her long pale green hair lifting as she bounded along.

‘It’s not far now’ she said, glancing either side of her as if trying to remember. ‘My home is a beautiful place. You will love it; I know you will love it.’ She looked back at them, grinning. ‘It’s this way.’

Lilith and Gael followed her for some time, several more hours passed, before they left the forest, and came out into the open once again.

‘We are nearly there’ Ena spoke eagerly. ‘So close now…’

She left her horse to be led by Gael as they journeyed onwards, following the main road before branching off and walking along smaller a dirt road.

‘In the winter’ Ena spoke, the boots she had been given by Jaspin crunching on the dry dirt, as she walked the path, the cloak he had given her trailing after her, ‘this road is difficult to travel. It rains heavily here; you cannot even leave this way sometimes. My family’s home is isolated somewhat, and that is how I like it.’ She turned back to the others, before picking up her pace. ‘Hurry’ she told them, ‘hurry along. We are almost there!’

They came to the bottom of a hill, following the path that now became steep, zigzagging backwards and forwards as it grew ever higher. The path here was lined with wood, and as they went, they passed wooden posts every so often that were erected either side of the path. These posts where all covered in ivy, within which bright flowers grew amongst the green, of the most beautiful Lilith had ever seen in her life.

‘Lilac sweet’ Ena said, pausing at one of these posts and caressing one of the flowers as she went by. ‘Violet eyes…raven locks…the flowers that grow here are the most beautiful on this earth.’ She cast a glance back at the others. ‘Vanity’s kiss’ she added, before moving on again.

They came to the top of the hill, and were quickly met with a small collection of cottages built before them. Some were clustered together; others built with more space around them. As they reached the last post at the end of the path, Ena paused, gazing about her, before setting off again at a run.

'Mother! Father!'

She was lost from sight for a moment as she dashed ahead of Lilith and Gael, seeking out her family. The angels picked up their pace to keep up with her, taking in the new place around them.

The cottages were built modestly, but were very cosy, with thatched roves and small windows with little wooden shutters. The wooden shutters were carved and painted with depictions of flowers, much like the ones they had seen along the path that approached this place.

People were dotted here and there, but the place seemed very quiet. They watched Lilith and Gael pass silently, their eyes lingering on them with curiosity.

Lilith and Gael who still led Vanity, rounded the corner Ena had disappeared behind, a small group of sheep parted to allow them by, and they saw Ena before them.

She was in the arms of a couple who held her tightly. Her mother and father had tears in their eyes as they embraced her, caressing her tenderly and holding her face in their hands.

Ena looked around; eyes wide and shining, her mother and father glanced up, looking over Ena's head and towards Lilith and Gael. Both were wearing an expression of shock and disbelief.

'This is the most astonishing thing I've ever seen' the mother said, stroking Lilith's wing with a gentle touch. 'I never thought I'd see the day…I thought the angels were just a myth.'

'I told you' Ena said to her mother from behind her, sitting at the kitchen table. 'Do you remember? It was many years ago, I was very young. But I told you with absolute surety that the angels would find me.'

'Yes' the mother said, withdrawing her hand and stepping back from Lilith who stood silently before her, her large snow-white wings almost taking up the entire room.

Beside Lilith, Gael had his wings open too; he and Lilith had revealed their wings on Ena's command. With Lilith's wings, and Gael's light blue ones too, there was very little room in the kitchen now.

The mother turned to Ena. 'You were right all along.' She smiled kindly. 'Kyrah. It's good to have you home at last.'

Nearby, the baby cried. Ena looked around towards her father, who held her little brother in his arms, rocking him gently.

'Sweet boy' Ena cooed, rising and sailing over to her father, taking the child from him in her arms. 'What a fragile thing.'

Nearby, Lilith turned away, wings still protruding from her back. She gazed longingly out of the tiny window, wondering where Jaspin, Reuben and Aski were. She began to grow worried.

They should have been back by now she thought unhappily. *What if something's happened to them? I wish I could go out to try to look for them.* She had asked Ena shortly before if she

were allowed to leave to search, but Ena had forbade either her or Gael to leave her side, and so she was to suffer here in worry and turmoil. She had spoken of her concerns with Ena, but Ena hardly listened to her. She seemed not to be worried for the other angels in the slightest. It was almost as if she didn't even notice they were gone, didn't notice, and didn't care.
Ena giggled, caressing her baby brother in her arms, stroking the baby's cheek with her slender fingers.
'It's so good to be home' Ena grinned.

Several hours passed, and Ena and the angels rested. The three of them began to make themselves at home, eat, and recover their strength.
The next day, Ena set the angels to work.
Lilith and Gael worked side by side, digging holes in the earth that were oval in shape and deep.
Lilith sweated in the sun, wiping her forehead with her wrist. *Why are we doing this?* Lilith thought to herself, not for the first time. *What is the purpose of this?* She stabbed the dirt with the spade, shovelling the dirt to the side. She wondered, burning with curiosity, but kept her thoughts to herself.
'Are you alright?' Gael asked beside her.
'Yes' Lilith answered shortly, glancing down at herself. Her dress was filthy. She hadn't changed for several days now, and longed to be clean. Her skin felt sticky, her white hair was greasy, and she burned now under the sun. 'We mustn't complain' Lilith told Gael. 'Ena wants us to do this. I don't know why, but we must obey her. She *is* the earth maiden after all.'
'Yes' Gael said, turning away again and returning his attention back to the task. 'I love her very much, I feel such a strong connection with her' he said as he continued to dig. 'I don't know why, I don't know where this stems from…but I feel like I've known her all my life.' He fell silent for a few moments. 'I would give my life for her if she asked me to; I would give my life…even if she simply asked for it.'
'Yes' Lilith mumbled, digging beside him. 'I would too…though I don't know why…I cannot explain it either.' *I've never felt this way before. Perhaps I am under a spell*. 'Do you think the others are ok?'
'Ena isn't worried' Gael replied, 'so neither am I. The others can look after themselves I am sure.'
'Do you truly think that way?'
'Yes.'
Lilith let out a sigh. 'That makes me feel a bit better. I am so very worried. I do care about the others.'
'Do you really?' Gael glanced sideways at her, pausing for a moment with a glint in his eyes, grinning at her slyly.
'Of course I do.'
'Even me?'
'Of course.'
Gael looked away again; Lilith saw his cheeks burn slightly, his jaw clench.
'That means a lot to me' he mumbled to her. 'It truly does.'

‘Lilith!’ came Ena’s voice, sailing through the air.
Lilith glanced around, seeing the earth maiden leaning through the window of her home, waving at her.
‘I have to go’ Lilith mumbled to Gael, dropping the spade and jogging over to the window to speak to Ena.
‘Come inside’ Ena told her eagerly as she approached, her pale green hair lifting in the breeze as she lent forwards. ‘Hurry.’
Lilith entered the home through the small door at the back, stepping into the tiny kitchen. Compared to the bright day outside where the sun burned in the sky, the inside of the house looked dark, and it took Lilith several seconds for her sight to adjust.
‘I told you my mother makes dresses didn’t I?’ Ena said to Lilith, bounding up to her.
‘Yes’ Lilith answered levelly, blinking several times as her vision became accustomed to the gloom.
‘It’s time’ Ena breathed excitedly, turning back to her mother who stood behind her. ‘Mother’s going to measure you’ Ena said facing Lilith again. ‘It’s time you were given some new clothes.’
‘Come here’ Ena’s mother spoke softly to Lilith. In her hand she held a measuring tape, and nothing more.
Lilith stepped forward.
‘Kyrah tells me that you're here to protect us’ the mother said as she brushed Lilith’s hair behind her shoulder.
Lilith remembered vaguely what Ena had said to them previously. Kyrah is what her family called her, Lotus is what the holy figures call her, and Zen is the name she was given by everyone else.
‘I don’t know’ Lilith answered meekly as the mother began to measure. ‘I think it’s more the other way around. The earth maiden is supposed to protect all of us.’
The mother paused momentarily, stepping back. ‘Yes’ she said quietly. ‘They told me before she was born that she would be different. I didn’t realise how until she grew up.’ The mother cast a glance over towards Ena, who waited silently nearby, perched on the edge of the kitchen table. Her long legs reaching the floor, her long arms folded before her, and her long hair pooled on the table behind. ‘My daughter’ the mother breathed. ‘She always was different.’ She continued to measure Lilith. ‘A mother is supposed to protect her child’ she went on, ‘but…I think Kyrah will protect me instead.’
She stepped back from Lilith then.
‘There’ she said. ‘Now what colour would you like your new dress to be?’
Lilith hesitated, suddenly unsure; she cast a glance over to Ena, before looking back to her mother.
‘Green’ Lilith answered.
The mother smiled widely.
‘Come with me’ Ena spoke up suddenly, rising from the table, sailing over to Lilith and taking her by the hand. ‘We’ll wash together. There are the most wonderful springs near here, naturally warm and sheltered.’ She giggled. ‘I like you. I'm going to make you look very pretty, like a doll.’ Ena sniggered behind her hand. ‘You're going to look beautiful in your new dress, even with those scars on your face.’

Ena left her family's home, walking along with Lilith's hand in her own, leading her.
Lilith's eyes met with Gael as they went, lingering her attention on him for a moment as he continued to dig the pits. He looked up, as if sensing her; time seemed to slow as their eyes locked, before Lilith bowed her head, facing ahead again.
She followed Ena, coming to a path, much like the one they had traversed to get here.
One lined with posts, enveloped by vines and the most beautiful flowers that grew in the land.
'Harp's chorus, Lily white' Ena listed them off, pausing to touch them, fingerers stroking the delicate petals as they went, but she still did not let go of Lilith's hand. 'Haunting dream…'
The path twisted and wound, very soon being enveloped by the foliage, the undergrowth which grew thickly, and the trees which grew tall, their canopy shielding them from the sky.
Lilith glanced nervously up at it one last time before it vanished, thinking briefly of Jaspin, before facing ahead again.
Where are you?
Ena had not spoken a word of them, not at all, except for the time she had been prompted by Lilith when she asked if she were allowed to look for them.
'The spring is this way' Ena giggled to her, casting her a sideways glance. She still had not let go of her hand. 'This is my spring' Ena went on. 'No one ever comes here.'
They wandered down this lonely road, which became ever wilder the further they went.
At last, the path faded away until only grass met their feet.
'Take off your shoes' Ena told Lilith, and she obeyed without question. Lilith did the same.
They came to the spring, a tranquil little pool surrounded by thickly growing trees and bushes.
They came to the edge of the spring, and Ena turned to her.
'Take off your clothes.'
Lilith flinched at that.
'It's alright' Ena soothed gently, reaching forwards and slipping Lilith's dress down her shoulders.
Lilith allowed Ena to undress her, stepping into the pool on her command and lowering herself into the water. Lilith stared into the clear water, hearing clothes shuffling behind her as Ena herself undressed too.
She followed Lilith into the water seconds later, naked as she was.
Ena raised her head to Lilith's, eyes sparkling. She giggled; moving closer and resting an arm across Lilith's chest as she held her by the shoulder, resting her head on her other shoulder.
'This is nice' Ena said, as he body became limp. 'Don't you think? Just the two of us…'
Lilith stared down at the earth maiden silently, holding her body to support her as Ena became limp. She bowed her head to Ena, touching her lips to her hair and breathing in her scent, feeling a surge of love towards this strange creature, like she had so many times before.
She pushed Ena gently back, Ena, who appeared to be in some sort of slumber now; she leant back against the edge of the pool, as Lilith began to wash herself.
It was sometime later, just when Lilith herself was beginning to doze, that he heard movement in the woods around her.

She whipped her head around, heart jolting in her chest as she heard a twig snap. She cast a nervous glance towards Ena, who remained motionless in the pool. Lilith watched closely for her breathing, and saw that it was shallow.
Lilith turned away again, towards the source the sound had come from. Her stomach began to tighten as she saw a figure approaching.
'Gael?'
She relaxed visibly then as Gael stepped forwards.
'Think again' Gael replied, stepping into the clearing and moving closer to the pool.
'You shouldn't be here' Lilith snapped harshly at him, moving her arm to cover herself.
'There's no need for that' Gael gleamed at her, kneeling beside the pool and reaching for her, grabbing her by the wrist and lifting her arm into the air. He giggled then.
Lilith blinked, frowning.
'….Ena?'
Gael's eyes lit up then, and he drew a slow intake of breath. 'Yes' he said, before letting go of her wrist and rising to his feet, moving away.
Lilith glanced towards Ena who remained motionless in the pool, before returning her attention back to Gael.
'So you can possess all of us I assume' Lilith mumbled unhappily.
'Don't be sad' Gael sang turning back to her. 'Gael is perfectly fine.'
'Then where is he now?'
'Suppressed.'
Lilith hesitated. 'Can you even posses Jaspin, the black and white angel, the strongest of all of us?'
'My dear Lilith' Gael moved closer to her. 'He is as much my puppet as you and Gael.'
Gael moved back suddenly, twirling on the spot with his arms out and eyes closed in content as he danced.
'Your own body is vulnerable when you do this' Lilith spoke out of the blue, hugging her knees to her as she sat in the water.
Gael stopped twirling suddenly, arms still extended. He lowered them, turning slowly to her.
'Some could hurt you when you do this' Lilith went on meekly.
'Not when I have the angels to protect me' Gael uttered.
'Are you going to hurt me?' Lilith asked. 'Did I speak out of turn?'
'There are towels by that post' Gael told her, and Lilith glanced around, seeing a stack of towels in a neat pile. 'Leave your filthy dress here, my mother will give you your new dress.'
'She's finished it already?' Lilith asked raising her head.
'Oh yes.' Lilith expected Gael to say more, but he didn't. He simply walked away.
Poor Gael Lilith thought as she watched him go. *How much of this will he remember? Will he even know what just happened to him?*
Minutes later, and Ena's body in the pool began to move. She furrowed her brow, raising her head and staring mutely at Lilith. For the longest time she didn't say anything.
'I must leave' she spoke at last. 'Mother is waiting for me.'
Ena rose from the pool, heading over to the post and picking up one of the towels to cover her body.
'I'll see you at home' Ena spoke back to Lilith without looking at her. 'Take your time.'

And then she left without another word.
Lilith watched her go, and then the strangest thought suddenly occurred to her.
I wonder what my own parents are doing now…

Chapter Twenty Seven
Through all the Pain

Lilith stayed in the pool for a while after that, resting back with her eyes closed.
It felt so good.
She stayed here for some time, until another figure stepped out from the foliage, one that should not have been there.
'You!' Lilith gasped, recognising the figure. She drew a slow breath of shock at the sight of the figure.
There were gashes all over her body, bruising and swelling and burns. One of her eyes was swollen shut, and as she smiled feebly, Lilith saw bloodied teeth behind her split lips.
'Hello' Freya, the false one said. 'I've found you…I'm so glad.'

Lilith was so shocked at the sight of her, she was unable to speak for the longest time.
'What…' she began finding her voice, 'what happened to you?'
'The angels' Freya said. 'They did this. The ones you call Jaspin, Reuben and Aski. They are here now.'
'They've returned?'
Lilith rose from the pool fast, climbing out and running to get the towel to head back.
But Freya stopped her as she made to pass her, hand shooting out to grab Lilith's arm.
Lilith whipped around, staring wide eyed at Freya.
Freya turned to face her.
'I am not the enemy you think I am' she told her. 'And the others are not the friends you think them to be. Look at what they did to me.'
Lilith stared back at her.
'You are the false one they say' she uttered.
'Let me ask you something' Freya said to her, still grasping Lilith's arm, who stood there completely naked. 'How do you know Ena is the good one and I am the bad one?'
Lilith didn't answer .
'Is it because she has more power?' Freya asked.
Lilith grabbed Freya's hand that held her, trying to prize herself free. But Freya only held her harder, pulling her closer.
'Maybe you are as bad as they are' Freya persisted. 'I do not know. But look at what they did to me. To an innocent girl. One who was only trying to help!'
Lilith stopped struggling, gazing back at Freya in horror.

‘But Freya’ one of the holy men spoke behind her. ‘We cannot let them go.’
‘I'm not’ Freya answered simply. ‘I will not.’ She watched the three angels fly away from her, soaring through the open sky. ‘But this is not the way.’ She turned behind her to the holy man that had spoken. ‘We will achieve nothing by force. We must be kind in our ways, gentle…’ she trailed off. ‘I have to be alone.’
‘You're too important to be left unguarded’ one of the holy men instantly told her.
‘I feel safe’ Freya told them. ‘The angels will not kill me.’
‘How do you know?’
‘Because…’ Freya said. ‘I have faith.’
She lifted the reins in her hands.
‘I have to reach the angels somehow’ she said. ‘I must. This is the most important thing of all. The angels are in danger…as are the rest of us.’
She tapped her heels into the horse, sending the mare forwards into a trot with a flick of the tail. The holy men hung back, watching as Freya left them, moving away to be alone. They cast their eyes down then upon the fallen men.
Freya urged her horse onwards, kicking her heels harder and riding it faster.
The wind whipped her short hair back, the chains that ran from the metal around her neck to the binds around her wrists jangled as she went, and she blinked back the tears from her stinging eyes.
‘I have to find the angels’ she mumbled to herself in worry. ‘They are in danger.’
She rode for several minutes across the open plains, before heading in another direction, and towards a collection of trees. A place that would be more secluded, hidden. Secret.
The horse beneath her began to tire, its body sweating and mouth foaming, but still she would not allow it to rest.
‘You cannot stop yet you beast’ she said to it. ‘I have to call them back before they return to *her*.’
She had nearly reached the trees now, and the horse still ran, though its pace had slowed now.
Freya touched her hand to her heart, closing her eyes as she called out to the angels, lighting her presence like a beacon.
They will come now. I know they will…
She entered the shelter of the trees in the forest before her, riding a short distance so that the open plains could not be seen, before dismounting.
Freya left the poor exhausted animal to wander free as she stepped forward, into an open space where the ground was relatively flat and the grass grew at her feet.
She swallowed the lump in her throat, hunching her shoulders and hugging herself, counting in her head every passing minute.
It seemed like no time at all, when she heard a noise, a disturbance in the trees in the branches above her.
Freya tensed, straightening and casting her head back as branches snapped and leaves tore in the canopy.
She stepped back as three figures fell to the ground before her, landing on their feet.

The figures of the three angels, Jaspin, Reuben and Aski stood before her. Menacing figures they loomed like tall columns in the failing light, each wearing an expression of anger and disgust.
'Why would you summon us?' Jaspin growled. 'The spell you cast to bring us here? You made us believe the true earth maiden was in danger.'
'I had to' Freya spoke defiantly, standing tall and facing them head on. 'I *have* to tell you, you are all in danger!'
Jaspin narrowed his eyes. Either side of him, Reuben and Aski glared at her silently, each as mistrustful as Jaspin.
'I am alone' Freya spoke quieter now, bowing her head. 'There are no holy figures to protect me.'
'Then it will make this easier' Jaspin grumbled.
Freya raised her head just as Jaspin raised his arm. The spell he summoned lifted her off her feet, throwing her back against a tree behind her.
Freya fell forwards with a moan, landing on her front.
She was given little reprieve however, as she was lifted off her feet again and thrown by magic across the forest, landing some distance away.
She pushed herself up, whipping around with wide eyes, gazing back at the angels in fear.
She screamed, as Reuben and Aski tore forwards, lunging for her. Jaspin remained where he was, watching passively as the angels ripped into her, attacking her mercilessly.
Hours passed.
'Enough of your lies!' Jaspin howled, bearing over her with a foot on her chest.
Freya moaned, coughing up blood, whole body wracked with agony.
'No…' she whispered, 'it is true what I have said to you…all of it is as true as we are here now…all of it…all of it….!'
She was lifted up again, and thrown on her front.
Freya began to cry.
'Stop…' she whispered, begging him. 'Please stop…I can't take it…'
'Give me one reason why we should not kill you' Jaspin spoke cruelly down to her. There was no pity in his eyes, no sympathy, nothing now that was human in any way.
He clearly felt nothing, not even anger.
'I will…' Freya spoke, she shuddered, her whole body trembling and eyes tight shut, before opening them again and continuing. 'I will do everything in my power to stop you, even if it means killing you…even you' she said to Jaspin. 'The black and white angel, the rarest of your kind…the most powerful.' She paused again, lying on the floor broken and bloodied. 'I cannot stop you from killing me now…but if I have to….when the time comes…I will kill you…if I can…if it means…saving the rest of us…I will…if I can.' She tensed, before her body relaxed again, speaking. 'I cannot stop you from killing me, I am not strong enough to protect myself from you…not yet…but……have you ever killed an innocent girl?'
Freya waited for the hammer to fall, waiting for the final blow.
But it never came.
So consumed with pain and fear, she did not even notice the angels leave. But when she looked up next, she saw that she was alone.

Freya sat up, using the last of her magic, to heal her broken arm, before forcing herself to stand, ignoring the rest of the pains in her body.
'I have to reach the angels' she moaned to herself. 'Perhaps the others will listen.'
She found her horse that had wandered away, and set off again without pause. Hungry, tired, and still in pain.
'I know where they are' she whispered to herself as she set off into the night, heading in the same direction as the two remaining angels were. The same direction as the angels that had nearly killed her.

'No' Lilith shook her head violently. 'No you're wrong! They would never do that, especially Jaspin……he is good…'
'Go to them then' Freya whispered dangerously. 'But know this…I *will* try to stop you. No matter what it takes. You and the others will cause unspeakable harm…on a scale that yet you cannot comprehend.'
Freya's grip loosened, and Lilith managed to pull herself free.
'I will do everything in my power to try to stop you' Freya was saying, glancing back at Lilith as she walked away. 'I do not want to harm you. But I will if I must.'
Freya disappeared in the shadow of the trees, quickly being swallowing by the foliage, the hedges that grew thickly around the pool.
Lilith stood rooted to the spot for a moment, before snapping back to herself.
She turned on her heel and stormed away, grabbing the towel on the floor by the post as she went, using it to cover herself, before marching back up the path and back towards the small village.
She traversed the path, picking up her pace to a jog as she made her way onwards.
She skidded to a stop at the end of the path, gazing in awe at the sight of three figures that stood in a row with their backs to her.
Jaspin, Reuben and Aski, back at last.
'You've finally returned' Lilith sighed, a smile breaking across her face. 'I'm so glad, I….'
She faltered suddenly, seeing how tense they were.
'What's wrong?' she mumbled, coming around to stand beside the others.
'Look' Aski whispered.
Lilith glanced around, not at first sure what they were looking at. And then she noticed something.
'Where is everyone?' she wondered aloud. 'Where's Gael?'
She looked back to the three angels, seeing that they were all watching her now.
'Where is Ena?'
'There' Reuben answered, looking towards the home in which Ena lived.
Lilith hesitated, glancing back at the angels. They said no more, and Jaspin remained utterly silent.
Lilith turned away from them, still holding the towel around her body with one hand.
She treaded carefully as she approached the house, walking slowly.

Everything around her felt still, almost like she were living a dream and not treading in reality.
She padded up to the house, feeling the dry dirt beneath her feet. Lilith stopped before the door, reaching out to touch the wood, she pushed the door open.
It swung inwards gently. Lilith saw no one within the house, and so she stepped in.
The first thing she found herself realising, was how quiet it was. This was a small house, that held a small family. It was usually quiet, but even so, there had always been a sound of some sort. The mother bustling around, keeping the home she was so proud of tidy, the father cooking, or playing with the baby that often cried for attention, as demanding as he was.
Lilith came to the master bedroom, where the parents slept. Here, she saw Ena, standing with her back to her and facing the bed.
Lilith stood in the doorway for several seconds, before speaking.
'……Ena?'
Ena turned, facing Lilith head on now.
Lilith's eyes travelled down, to the baby Ena held in her arms, her little brother.
Lilith was horrified, to see the child's skin was utterly pale.
He was dead.
Lilith's eyes flickered back up then, back to Ena's face. Ena stared back at Lilith with a level expression.
'I am not the monster you think I am' Ena said in a level tone, before falling silent then.
Lilith tilted her head, trying to see behind her. Ena, seeing what she was doing, stepped to the side to allow Lilith to seen.
Lilith's eyes grew wide with horror, as she saw Ena's parents lying on the bed side by side with eyes closed.
Lilith looked back to Ena as she approached her, still holding the baby.
'You've been talking to my imposter' Ena said to Lilith. 'I know you have. I can smell her scent on you.'
She walked past Lilith, and out into the corridor, pausing then.
'I want you to bury them' Ena said back to Lilith. She looked up then, to the corridor around them, the ceiling above; the outside world through the window beside. 'This world….' Ena spoke in a distant mumble, as if in a trance, '….is sick….'
She turned back to Lilith, one arm holding the child, the other limp by her side.
'I want you to bury them' Ena said again. 'And…' she added with a smile, 'your dress is ready.
She lifted the finished dress that hung from a hook beside her. Lilith had not noticed it.
'Dress' Ena said, holding the dress in one hand and offering it to Lilith. 'Then do as I say.'
Lilith gazed down at the dress. It was simple, modest, and pretty. Coloured pale green and white, with a very low back.
'For your wings' Ena smiled, seeing Lilith stare. 'Come' Ena said kindly, placing one arm around Lilith's shoulders and walking with her away so that she could change. 'You're going to look beautiful in that dress' she said to her. 'Like a doll.'
Lilith walked with Ena, who still held the child. Lilith held the dress in one hand, with the other; she still held the towel to her.

Lilith dressed quickly; her new clothes fit her well, but felt strange.
'Follow me' Ena said, moving away, and Lilith did so.
They left the cottage, and Lilith stopped, standing in the open doorway, as Ena walked forwards. She knelt by one of the oval holes that Lilith and Gael had dug, and placed her brother gently into it. The other angels, Jaspin, Reuben and Aski hovered near the grave, looming over her as Ena leant back again.
'Burry him' she commanded, and the angels like puppets obeyed.
When this was done, Ena sent the angels into the house to fetch her parents. Jaspin carried her mother, and Aski, her father.
They were buried alongside their child.
Lilith stayed by the cottage, clinging to the wall behind her, watching in silence as this was carried out.
She slipped away, walking around to the back of the cottage.
She had become so numb, that the sight of the others bodies scattered around the village did not shock her.
Lilith walked forwards; her path meandered around many of the fallen. And here is where she found Gael.
He turned to her. Dirt was smeared across his face, over his clothes, his knees and arms. The body he carried now was that of a young woman, barely seventeen years old.
He turned away again, lowering her body into one of the shallow graves, and piling dirt over his silently.
'She wanted me to do this' he voiced at last, as Lilith continued to watch him. 'She wanted me. I cannot disobey her…' he spoke quietly, only in a mumble.
She barely heard him.
Lilith tensed then, turning her head sharply towards a small figure that moved towards her, a young boy.
'Where's mama' the boy pleaded, shuffling closer to Lilith, eyes teary and body trembling. 'Why is everyone sleeping?'
'Oh you poor boy.' Ena suddenly appeared at Lilith's side, sailing past her and towards the boy, kneeling before him and placing long fingers around his arms. 'Everything is alright' she spoke softly. 'Everything is as it should be.' She smiled then. 'Your mother is sleeping' Ena whispered to the boy. 'She is in a happy place, a place far from here. Would you like to go there too?'
'I want to be with mama' the boy sobbed.
'You will' Ena whispered, running her hand over his head. 'Now…'
The boy's body suddenly went limp, and she held him firmly, lowering him to the ground gently to lay there, and as Lilith gazed down at him, she knew that he was dead.
Jaspin, Reuben and Aski appeared then, having finished burying Ena's family.
'This isn't the end for him' Ena spoke to the boy, but addressing Lilith. 'He will live on. He will be born again.'
She rose to her feet, straightening up. Her long pale green hair touched the earth, and as she stood, she stood taller than the rest, despite her young age.
'Come!' she barked to the other angels. 'Follow me.'

The five angels trailed after her to a wheat field near the village, where several people worked.
'Ena' spoke an old man, dabbing at his brow with a handkerchief as she approached. 'What a surprise to see you here.'
She approached him silently, stopping before him. Without a word, she raised her hand to him, running her fingers over his head.
The man died before he hit the ground. The others who worked in the field saw this too, but were too confused to understand what they had seen, and knew not to be afraid.
And so, one by one, Ena approached them, and killed them all.
The sun was setting now, and the six figures that remained alive stood in the wheat field as the red from the setting sun bled across the sky. The yellow of the wheat field basked in an orange glow, and Ena's pale green hair looked strange in this light.
'Do you know' Ena began, gazing up at the cosmos, 'why the sun sets red? It's because…light is made up of many different colours, and out of all of them…red is the one that travels the farthest.'
She turned to the five angels that stood in a semi-circle behind her, all silent, all facing her.
'We must not be sad' Ena said to them. 'Nothing lives forever, and in the end…everything will die…and return to the earth…I too will be dead one day…as will all of you……' She cast her gaze down at the nearest man dead at her feet. 'The crows will feast on him. The animals will scatter his bones. His body will rot, and its nutrients will return to the earth, as nature intended.' She looked back at the angels. 'Bring my horse. We must leave this village. There is nothing left for us here…and we must cure the sickness.'
Jaspin went to fetch Vanity, returning to Ena with the mare.
'This is the first place to be cleansed' Ena said, taking the reins of her horse. 'Next…is the rest of the world…'

Back in the village, a lone figure stood.
Freya hugged herself as she gazed about at the dead around her, some of which had been buried in shallow graves, others left where they had fallen.
Still wracked with pain, though not all physical, she bowed her head, her short hair falling over her face.
Here is where she stayed, until the holy figures found her. She fell into their arms crying. They cared for her, fed her, tended to her wounds; then allowed her to rest.
As she slept upon the earth on a warm bed, the holy figures, her protectors, burned fires in the village, praying over the bodies of the deceased, before moving on.
In the morning, there would be nothing left of the village, save for ash, and charcoal and smoke.

Chapter Twenty Eight
The Next Stage

Lilith knelt before the alter, head bowed and hands together, praying.

It had been several days since they left the village, and now she found herself in a large temple. A tall building made of grey stone and built in an angular fashion, with many sharp spires pointing to the sky. Within many of the large rooms, the ceiling was so high, that nothing could be seen.
Who knew what lurked in the dark world above them?
Lilith prayed now for the souls that had been lost in the village they had left behind. She was afraid now. Afraid for all of them, for herself, but mostly, she was afraid for Jaspin, whom she had come to care for deeply.
He joined her now. Hearing movement by her side, Lilith glanced up to see Jaspin kneeling beside her. He was praying as she had been.
For several minutes, neither spoke, trapped within their own minds with whatever thoughts they had.
Jaspin eventually faced her.
'Something troubles you' he spoke.
Lilith looked at him with fear in her eyes.
'I'm afraid' she whispered.
Jaspin turned, leaning back against the alter with his arm resting upon a knee as he considered her.
'Share your worries with me.'
'It's just…' Lilith began in a whisper, 'back at the village…'
'You're upset about the people who have died?'
'I feel they might have died needlessly.'
'Ena assures us that they will be born again, reincarnated in another body, in another time.'
'But…' Lilith mumbled, voice barely audible. 'How could one do that to their own family?'
'If you care for your family, wouldn't you see to their needs first before others?'
Lilith raised her eyes to Jaspin.
'Ena tells us' Jaspin went on, 'that the sickness is going to spread, and soon……that is why she had to make sure her family was taken care of. And the rest of the village also, the people she grew up around and knew; the ones that cared for her…'
'How do you know' Lilith breathed, 'that what she says is true?'
'I love Ena' Jaspin said, his expression a frown now. 'I feel the same bond with her as you do. You cannot deny it, nor pretend that it isn't there. We all feel it. It's the ancient tie that keeps up all together, just like angels feel a connection to each other, we all feel a stronger connection to the earth maiden. She is our mother.'
'Then who is the false one?'
Jaspin's expression darkened at that.
'The false one' she spoke with a sneer on his lips. 'She is the shadow of the true maiden. Everything that was incorrect about the earth maiden, was put into *her*, and she became known as the false one.' Jaspin looked around to the alter behind him. 'The religion in these lands tells of a god who created everything. One of the things he created was an angel who turned against him. God cast this angel from heaven, and he became known as the first fallen angel, a being who was evil.'
'I know those stories' Lilith whispered. 'When I was young I was read those tales from the holy books, and everyone blames this fallen angels for his sins in turning against god, and

they say that everything bad that happens is his fault. But isn't god the one who wiped out whole races of people throughout history, time and again? Through flood…through fire….'
'The people deserved to be punished' Jaspin replied.
'For building a tower that was too high?' Lilith asked.
Jaspin watched her silently.
'I know what you're saying' Lilith spoke to her knees, leaning to the side and resting on the hard floor. 'There is a parallel between this god and the earth maiden.'
'Yes' Jaspin mumbled. 'Ena is a god to our angels. Freya is the fallen one.'
'But how do you know god is the good one and the fallen one is the bad one?'
Jaspin turned to her.
'God has caused more suffering and pain and death than the fallen one ever could' she uttered, head bowed with a hand upon her heart.
'Because' Jaspin replied, 'god is the one who created all life, and Ena…she gives life and takes life at will.'
'But doesn't that make her the evil one?'
'No.'
'So is Ena more powerful that Freya?'
'Yes.'
'Then why doesn't Ena get rid of her?' Lilith raised her head. 'If Freya is truly the bad one, wouldn't that make it right?'
'There is a balance that must be maintained in this world' Jaspin answered simply. 'It's all part of a greater plan.'
'What plan?' Lilith cried. 'And at what cost? Is it worth it for all this suffering?'
'I don't pretend to understand Ena' Jaspin answered. 'I simply obey.'
Lilith bowed her head, balling her fists as her sides.
'Do you truly trust the earth maiden' she asked. 'Do you really think she means to good for us in the end?'
'Yes' Jaspin answered quietly. 'I know this in my heart to be true, because I have faith.' He stared at Lilith intently. 'Very soon' he said, 'you will have to decide your loyalty.'

A short while later, Lilith and Jaspin walked side by side.
The long corridors were empty, silent from all but their footsteps as the pair made their way forwards. They came to end of the corridor, passing through an archway and coming out into a larger room. As they passed below the archway, they saw the tips of gold wings hanging above them. Jaspin and Lilith turned, seeing in the window above the balcony on the next level up, Reuben resting on his front with his eyes closed. His head was resting on the crook of his folded arm, the other arm hanging over the edge of the window, and wings hanging also.
Reuben began to stir, as Jaspin and Lilith continued their way forwards, entering the corridor on the other side of the room. They heard the sound of wings beating the air, and boots landing lightly on the stone ground, and footsteps as Reuben began to follow them.

They passed now a large statue of a woman, sitting with her arms open and head tilted. Upon her lap, Aski lay here, resting back with his eyes closed. He stirred as Jaspin and Lilith came closer, sitting up straight and opening his eyes.
Aski slid off the lap of the statue, standing tall as Jaspin and Lilith stopped beside him. Reuben came to join them, slowing to a stop. Lilith glanced from each of the three men; they all wore the same clothes now, clothes they had been given by the holy figures. White shirts with bare backs, to allow their wings to come forth without tearing their clothes.
'Where is Gael?' Lilith asked the others.
'He's this way' Aski told her, moving away down the corridor. 'Follow me.'
Jaspin, Lilith and Reuben trailed after Aski, coming to a round window that looked out onto a garden.
The four angels stood at the window, gazing out at the small garden which basked in the moonlight.
Here they saw Gael with the earth maiden. Ena was holding both his hands in hers, laughing and smiling at him and the two spun and danced together, Ena's long pale green hair swirling around them. Ena let go of Gael then, kissing him on the cheek before turning and skipping away. Gael made to go after her.
'She has grown very fond of Gael most of all' Aski spoke in a murmur. 'They've hardly left one another's side.'
'Where are the other holy figures?' Lilith asked suddenly.
'Ena sent them away' Jaspin replied solemnly. 'We are the only ones here.'
'So what happens now?' Lilith asked. 'What are we doing here?'
'Ena will decide.'

'We are waiting.'
'Waiting?' Lilith echoed.
'Yes' Ena replied.
The angels were all gathered now, sitting facing inwards. Ena sat close to Gael, still holding one of his hands in hers.
'What are we waiting for?' Lilith asked her.
'You will know' Ena answered. 'When the time is right.'
The angels split off shortly after that, each going their own separate ways, except for Gael, who remained by Ena's side.
Lilith wandered alone, Jaspin who had stayed with her for most of the time they had been here, had gone away. So now, Lilith was in her own company.
She wandered out of the temple, out of the large and echoing rooms and colossal halls and into one of the many small gardens that were scattered within the place, surrounded by the tall buildings all around.
Lilith stepped down to the grasses. The garden here was built in many layers. The flowerbeds overflowing with splashes of colour, though they could not been seen clearly in the moonlight. The only thing that could be seen, where hints and impressions of the colours that they truly were.
Lilith moved down the path, the steps shallow and wide.

Her feet touched the grass, and she moved forward, reaching out to touch the petals beside her as she went, stroking them, caressing them.
She came to stop before a statue of a woman. The woman of stone wore a veil over her hair, head bowed to the bowl she held in her arms, which was overflowing with ivy that grew up, snaking its way around her arms and the rest of her body. Stuck in the soil in the bowl was a small gardening fork. As Lilith glanced around her, she saw other tools laying about also.
This was a place of love and peace. This garden was well cared for.
'I thought I would find you alone.'
Lilith turned to the voice, heart constricting in her chest as she gazed upon the profile of Freya.
'Hello Lilith.'

Ena gasped suddenly, becoming tense.
'It's here' she breathed.
Gael who sat beside turned to her.
'What's here?' he asked.
'The thing we all came here for. The thing I've been waiting for….I sense the presence.'
She rose to her feet suddenly, arms out either side of her, feeling the air and glancing feverishly back and forth.
'I can feel its existence…' she whispered. And then she turned and stared in one direction.
'This way' she uttered, before moving off.
Gael stood and followed her, walking in her footsteps as she padded slowly forwards.
They came to the end of the corridor which opened up into a larger room.
Ena stopped and turned to the side, staring fixated at a statue of a woman, wearing a veil, head bowed and hands together.
Ena did not move.
Gael approached and stood by her side, staring at the statue also, though he felt nothing. No presence, no pull as he did with the earth maiden.
He was just about to speak, to ask her something, when he suddenly saw what had captured her attention.
A figure moved out from behind the statue, gliding like a ghostly apparition.
It could not be seen whether the figure was a man or a woman, as the profile was all covered, wearing a hooded black robe, and black gloves to cover the hands. The face was covered also, the figure wearing the most unusual mask. A crow's mask, black, with a long beak and large glass eyes like windows, behind which was nothing but shadow.
'You've come to me at last' Ena spoke.
The figure moved closer. Gael became tense, moving between the approaching figure and Ena to protect her.
'It's ok' Ena said to him, placing a hand upon his arm. 'He's a friend.'
Gael glanced to her briefly, before returning his attention to the figure.
He stepped back.
'I believe you have something to tell me' Ena prompted. 'The spell…'

‘Yes’ the masked figure replied sombrely, speaking in a mature male voice. ‘You want to cure the sickness that is ravaging this world. It’s not so bad now…but it will get much worse……’

She stood there on the other side of the small garden at the top of the steps leading out.
With short blonde hair, she wore a gold bar around her neck like a collar, and around each of her wrists were the similar gold bars. From each wrist and going to her collar, were three thin chains. From her neck and attached to the gold collar, was a necklace, of two snakes intertwined, their tails formed a downwards point like that of a spear.
‘What are you doing here?’ Lilith asked the false maiden.
‘I came to look for you’ Freya replied.
‘You want to use me’ Lilith spoke firmly. ‘You want to turn me against the others.’
‘No’ Freya shook her head. ‘I only ask for your help. You saw what the *other* one did to that village, to her own family. You must know now that she is evil.’
Lilith took a step away, leaning back against the bowl the statues behind her held, gripping the edge with both hands.
‘The angels are my brethren. They are my brothers…my family…’
‘They are just as evil as the earth maiden…’ Lilith narrowed her eyes at this. ‘But you're different’ Freya continued. ‘You are different from the others. I know. I know you’ve doubted her. I can see it in your heart.’
‘I did’ Lilith admitted. ‘It’s true. I have doubted the earth maiden in the past. But Jaspin has assured me she is to be trusted. I trust him. And if he tells me Ena it to be trusted and obeyed, then I believe him, and I will follow him.’
‘This Jaspin means a lot to you?’ Freya questioned.
Lilith gritted her teeth, keeping her lips tight shut.
‘I see’ Freya said, turning her head away. ‘I had hoped…’
‘You cannot control me’ Lilith spoke harshly to her. ‘You cannot sway me, nor can you trick me and turn me against the others. I am loyal to all of them. The earth maiden most of all.’
‘She is evil’ Freya spoke firmly turning her head back to her. ‘If you had any idea what she plans…’
Lilith did not allow her to finish, she whipped around, grabbing the small fork that stuck out of the soil in the bowl behind her and hurling it as fast as she could at Freya.
Freya gasped, unable to get out of the way in time. The thing struck her, the sharp forks cutting her face.
Freya stumbled back, hand going to her cheek as she stared at Lilith in shock.
‘I will follow the angels and the earth maiden’ Lilith gasped, body trembling with fury and shoulders hunched as she glared. ‘I will follow them….to whatever end…’
‘I had hope to sway you against the others’ Freya spoke firmly, recovering from the shock, lowering her hand and straightening up. ‘But you are just as bad as the rest of them.’
Lilith held her breath then, eyes wide as she saw several figures step from the dark, flanking the false maiden.
Her body guards Lilith realised as she froze. *So she didn’t come alone*.

‘You have no idea what you're doing’ Freya snarled viciously, baring her teeth. ‘I wish as least you live to see the damage you will cause…’
Lilith turn tailed and ran, back into the temple. The holy figures that protected Freya making after her, slipping knives they carried from their sleeves and into their hands. They pursued her.
‘Kill them!’ Freya ordered the men as they went. ‘Kill them all!’
They all set of, leaving Freya alone in the garden.
Freya let out a sigh, bowing her head and hugging herself.
‘….I wish this were not the only way…’

Lilith was grabbed from behind by one of the holy figures that gave chase. Her first instinct was to throw her head back and crack him on the nose. A move very unlady-like, and very unexpected. The man stumbled back, cursing and spewing words that were very unholy, grabbing his face as blood seeped between his fingers.
But Lilith did not pause to look back; she kept running, darting away from him at the moment he let her go.
She tripped then, whipping her head back, hands working feverishly at the thing that had tripped her, trying desperately to free her legs. One of the holy men had thrown something at her, a curious thing and a thing she had not seen in a long time. Two items tied together by a section of thin rope, and designed for such a purpose.
She was able to rise, just in time as one of the robed figures lunged at her with a knife.
She dodged his swipe, again and again, always stepping back away from him, reaching forward at the right moment with lightning speed and disarming him before he knew what had happened.
The holy man stared in shock and surprise at his empty hand, as he saw then his weapon in Lilith’s.
She stepped back cautiously, arms raised before her ready to attack or defend when necessary.
‘I am not the typical woman you think I am’ she spoke coldly to the stranger. ‘I've lived on the streets.’
The holy man straightened before her, hands relaxing and falling limp to his side.
Behind him, more holy figures approached slowly. Lilith’s eyes darted to each of their faces, then about the hall around her, as she searched for an escape route.
I have to get out of here… she thought desperately, growing fearful now though refusing to show it. *They mean to kill me…they mean to kill the others…* she gritted her teeth.
……Ena……

‘It is as I first thought’ Ena spoke, turning from the masked figure towards Gael. ‘This is not going to be easy. Will you follow me to the end?’
‘Without hesitation’ Gael spoke sincerely, leaning forward and taking her hand in his and squeezing it.
‘Even to your own death?’ she questioned.

‘Yes’ Gael replied without pause.
‘The other will have to be told’ Ena mumbled, eyes dropping. She spoke to the masked figure now. ‘Will you be watching over us?’
‘We are always watching over everything’ the figure replied.
A scream rang through the halls and rooms around them. Gael tensed, the masked figure looked up, and Ena tilted her head, listening.
‘That voice…’ she spoke in a distant tone, ‘…it’s Lilith.’
‘I have to go to her’ Gael said firmly, his voice trembling. ‘I have to.’
‘Do what you must’ Ena said to him lazily, becoming quickly distracted.
Gael marched away swiftly. He paused only a few steps away and turned back to Ena, who stared at him with no emotion.
‘No’ Gael whispered, moving back to Ena’s side. ‘That is what our enemy would want…I cannot leave your side. I must protect you.’
Ena smiled widely now, cupping his face in her hands. ‘You passed my test. I'm glad you made this decision. And so are you.’
The two of them looked around then, suddenly noticing the masked figure was gone.

Lilith was thrown on her front, screaming in pain as the knife ripped into her shoulder.
‘Just kill her!’ she heard one of the men shout from above her.
On hearing this and without a second pause, Lilith summoned her wings. Her beautiful white wings shot out from her back, pushing the holy figures away and giving her time to crawl forwards, rising to her feet.
Lilith stumbled as she went, sobbing in fear. The area around her eye where she had been hit was tender and already beginning to bruise. She had several other injuries over her body, small cuts and grazes. But if she managed to survive from this, she would be grateful that these injuries were all she suffered.
She heard suddenly one of the men drop behind her, and dared to turn to back to see.
One of the holy men had fallen to the floor dead, a shaft of blue light protruding from his body. Magic. A thing that had been summoned to kill.
Lilith glanced up to the balcony above, staring wide eyed and trembling as she saw Reuben standing there. A step behind him was Aski. They both loomed over the edge with looks of disgust on their faces, Reuben’s lip curled back in a sneer.
And then they stepped forward, off the edge they fell through the air, wings stretched out as they descended, landing between Lilith and the holy men that attacked her.
They were vastly outnumbered, but they didn’t care.
They fought, while Lilith hobbled away.
‘Curse this’ she whined desperately to herself glaring. ‘Why must I be this way? Why can I not *fight*?’ since she had been bound to Jaspin, she had only become a shield, and had lost any abilities she might have had to summon magic to attack and fight back.
She hugged herself, tears in her eyes as she stopped suddenly, ignoring the fighting that was just behind her, and not turning to look.
I wish things could change…I wonder if the process can be undone…

It was then as she glanced up, that she saw Jaspin standing before her, wearing an expression of shock and disbelief.
She stumbled towards him, falling into his arms.
'Jaspin…' she breathed, '…I'm sorry.'
He pushed her back gently, gazing into her face as he gripped her shoulders firmly.
His attention then drifted past her, and towards the figures of Reuben and Aski, fighting with the holy men.
They were outnumbered, and beginning to struggle. It was clear, they would not last long.
Lilith saw Aski stumble, falling to a knee and grasping the gash in his shoulder.
'What are we going to do?' Lilith uttered, still holding onto Jaspin. 'They'll kill us…'
'We cannot escape' Jaspin replied sombrely. 'Not now we have the earth maiden……we could fly away……but we cannot leave her behind…they would catch her.'
'I know' Lilith breathed.
Her face screwed up then as she saw Reuben being thrown to the floor, he roared in pain and in fury as the attacking figures descended on him, swords to this throat.
'We're going to die here…' Lilith sobbed. She turned then, heart stopping in her chest as she saw Ena standing there, at the top of the steps leading into the next room, with Gael by her side.
She was smiling.
One by one, the holy figures began to notice her, pausing and turning to her, directing their attention away from the angels.
One of the holy men released Aski, whom he had been holding up against the wall.
Aski fell to his knees with a moan, clutching at a wound at his side.
'There she is!' one of the holy men cried. 'The evil one! The demon!'
'Now that's not very nice' Ena replied quietly. She giggled then, lifting a foot and stepping slowly down the steps and into the hall.
'Ena…' Jaspin breathed, staring at her wide-eyed as she passed him. 'What are you doing here? You should get away…they'll hurt you.'
'No' Ena said, pausing by his side and facing him as she spoke. 'I am able to protect myself…at least to a certain extent.'
Ena giggled again, smiling to Jaspin as she reached for him, caressing his cheek, before moving off again, towards the holy figures, with Gael following closely in her footsteps.
The holy figures parted as she walked forward, fearlessly into the group that would kill her, and as Ena went, she saw hate in their eyes.
'There you are' came another voice, and the others looked up to see Freya on the other end of the hall, facing them, facing Ena.
'I knew you would come to me' Ena breathed.
Freya walked forward. The holy figures parted for her too.
Freya tilted her head. The cut on her cheek clearly visible.
'So' Freya said, standing feet away from Ena. 'Here we are. We meet at last.'
'Here we are' Ena echoed. 'My other half.'
'You cannot escape this place' Freya told her confidently. 'There are hundreds of holy soldiers surrounding this temple.'

‘It’s true’ Jaspin called out from behind Ena. ‘We would be lucky not to be shot down if we try to escape.’
‘Are they all of your people?’ Ena asked Freya casually, her tone a little playful. She giggled. ‘So nice of you to bring them all to me.’
Freya took a step away, tilting her head back; a sneer upon her lips as she regarded Ena, who stood a head taller than everyone in the room. Ena stood out most in the room, was the most distinguished, even more so than the angels, their wings now showing, with her unusual height and unnaturally skinny body, and her long pale green hair that reached her angles.
She looked so frail.
‘I could break you if I wanted’ Ena whispered. ‘You are no companion to me. I would feel no remorse if I killed you.’
‘You would feel no remorse for anyone’ Freya counted. ‘You have no soul, nothing inside that makes you human. You are hollow.’
Behind Ena, Gael snarled. Balling his fists, muscles like rock. As Lilith watched him, she thought that he might be ready to pounce. She did not put it past him to attempt ripping Freya to shreds with his bare hands.
She felt Jaspin’s grip tighten on her then, glancing towards him, she saw he had become tense also, but unlike Gael, he looked suddenly afraid now, the flesh below his eyes twitching.
He pulled Lilith back sharply, hugging her to him.
‘Jaspin…’ Lilith gasped alarmed, ‘…what?’
‘Ena don’t!’ Jaspin cried.
Ena giggled then, casting her arms out as Freya before her jumped back.
Lilith felt a sudden and sharp pain wrack her body. Her arms fell to the side, and she collapsed. Jaspin too teetered on the edge of consciousness, having let go of her. He tilted his head to the side, shoulders slumped, then he too fell. Gael was already on the floor, as were Reuben and Aski.
And as Lilith lay there, eyes fluttering, she saw with blurred vision Freya collapse also, along with every single one of the holy figures that sought to kill them.
That was the last she knew, before she knew nothing.

Chapter Twenty Nine
Perspective

Jaspin was the first to wake.
He moaned in pain, hand going to his head where it had cracked against the stone floor.
He lowered his hand, remaining where he was for a few moments, staring up at the ceiling above, at the intricate diamond tiles, deep blue and glittering like the sea.
He rolled over, picking himself gingerly up from the floor, agony splitting through his head. Though he did his best to ignore it, did his best to stand.
Jaspin looked to the ground beside him, seeing Lilith lying there.
He knelt beside her, touching her neck, and watching her breathing.

When he was reassured, he rose to his feet again, wobbling slightly, and turning towards *the ones*.
Freya had fallen, as Ena had too. Jaspin was the only one standing now.
He approached Ena, looking over her to see that she was alright, and once he saw her breathing, saw the pulse beating in her long neck, he turned his attention onto Freya.

His footsteps were heavy as he trudged closer to her, pausing to pick up a sword one of the holy figures had dropped.
He stood over her, lifting the blade high.
Freya's eyes snapped open, just as Jaspin plunged the sword downwards.
Her body flashed, and in the blink of an eye, she was gone.
Jaspin stared hard, glaring at the spot she had been not a moment before.
He heard a noise, then looked around, seeing Freya kneeling a short distance away, breathing heavily, a look of hate and fury in her eyes. There was frustration there also in her body language, Jaspin could see.
Her body flashed again, and she was gone, then a third time, and Jaspin saw her standing above him, looming over the balcony watching. She stepped back, then turned and ran away out of sight, swiftly making her escape.
Jaspin let out a breath, straightening up and lowering his arms. Body relaxed now, he allowed the sword to slip from his grip and clatter to the floor.
Beside him, a figure groaned.
Jaspin turned his head towards the figure.
Reuben pushed himself off the ground, lying on his front. He wretched, throwing up blood, he brought a shaking hand to wipe his mouth.
Jaspin glanced behind him then as Lilith began to rise, Gael did also, but Aski did not.
Jaspin went over to him as Gael rushed up to Ena, falling to his knees by her side, hands shaking as they hovered over her body, his breath caught in his throat.
'She's fine' Jaspin grumbled at him. His attention returned to Aski, who remained still. 'Aski is alive…….he should have woken by now.'
Lilith straightened, hugging herself, she remained where she was.
'She's injured' Gael whispered, brushing Ena's hair back tenderly, like a mother would to a child. 'Oh' he sighed miserably, 'poor creature.'
'Leave her' Jaspin spoke harshly to him. 'She is fine.' He cast his eyes out to the bodies of the holy figures that littered the wide corridor. 'Some of them are alive' he breathed, rising to his feet and reaching for the sword again. 'We must finish them.'
The man nearest him let out a cry as he plunged the sword through his chest, jerking the blade back sharply and moving away, searching the bodies for those that were still living.
Gael took up a sword, and began to do the same. Jaspin and Gael left the area, travelling out of the corridor and to the other rooms within the temple, then outside the temple itself, killing all they found still alive.
Back in the corridor, Lilith remained, alone now with Reuben, the only other being in the room that was conscious. Reuben sat up, leaning back and clutching at his chest, moaning in pain, tears running down his cheeks.
Lilith walked forwards, stepping carefully around the bodies around her and towards Ena.

She knelt beside the earth maiden, reaching out to touch her shoulder and turning her over gently.
She saw that where Ena had fallen, the entire half of her body was terribly bruised.
'A delicate flower' Lilith uttered, '…you poor thing…'

Jaspin plunged the sword into the man's throat as he knelt before him, begging for his life.
But Jaspin had no heart for him, nor time to hear his pleading. He killed without thought or hesitation. A man of his age had seen much death in his life. He had seen those he loved being taken away from him, and had taken loved ones from others in turn. It was nothing but a process to him, a cycle.
Jaspin stepped back, his breath slow and deep. He turned to Gael who was nearby, cleaning the blade of the sword he carried, before remembering that it wasn't his and tossing it.
'That's the last of them' Gael said to Jaspin.
Jaspin then looked to the sky, his jaw clenched and eyes wide.
'An omen' he breathed, seeing the bronze clouds. 'It's a sign…of the bad that is to come.'
Gael approached him, turning and standing shoulder to shoulder.
The two angels watched the unnatural pictures around them, basking in the strange dimmed light of the clouds.
'It will go soon' Gael uttered.
Jaspin bowed his head.
'I wonder what will happen now.'

Reuben let out a feeble moan, curled up and hugging his body. He had tried to stand, using the wall for support. But there was something wrong with him. Something inside.
'Reuben' Lilith spoke to him, trying as her best not to let her voice waver as she knelt over him. 'Try not to move.'
Reuben's body suddenly wracked as he coughed violently, causing him more pain. He tried to wipe his mouth. Lilith saw blood on the back of his hand as he did so.
'I…' he mumbled, glancing up at Lilith. 'I don't know…if I'm going to survive…I'm…' he shuddered then before continuing. 'I'm….broken inside….'
'Don't say that' Lilith sobbed, voice breaking. 'I've only just found you……please don't go…'
Reuben grimaced. Lilith saw then his eyes were slowly turning bloodshot red, and blood was beginning to seep from his ears and nose.
'Go to Aski' Reuben ground his teeth. He tilted his head back to look towards him.
Unlike the others, Aski had not moved yet, and Lilith for that instant feared the worst.
'Go' Reuben sobbed, becoming desperate. 'See him' he whispered, '…please…'
Lilith rose slowly, stepping reluctantly over to him. She knelt, but before she touched him, she knew the worse was true.
'He's dead' she whispered, withdrawing her hand from his cold touch.
Reuben rolled onto his back, crying openly now, his tears mixed with blood as he cried.
'Reuben' Lilith urged him. 'Try not to move, you'll injure yourself further.'

Reuben turned his head towards her. He did not look at her, but past her. As he did this, Lilith heard the sound of movement behind.
Lilith glanced around.
Ena was moving.
Lilith watched as the earth maiden rose gingerly to her feet. She straightened up, wobbling on the spot as she teetered on her heels, threatening to topple over again, before righting herself.
Lilith stood, drawing back as she saw Ena approach. Her movement was unsteady. Lilith fearing that she might fall again moved closer to her, ready to catch her if needed.
But Ena needed no help; she held her hand up to Lilith to push her back.
'I need no assistance' Ena smiled. 'I can manage.'
Lilith drew away again.
Ena stood over Aski's body, gazing at him intently with a hardened expression, before turning away.
'Where is the other one?' Ena spoke aloud, addressing no one in particular. Though Lilith was the only one who could answer.
'She is gone' Lilith replied, in a distant voice.
Ena's attention then fell on Reuben, whose breath was shallow, and skin paling.
'I've not much magic left' Ena breathed. She addressed Reuben now. 'I could save you. But I have not the magic for both of you.' She looked over Aski again. 'Do you want me to save him? I cannot if too much time has passed…but Aski has only just left this life. If I am quick…'
'Save him' Reuben whispered; his voice barely audible now. 'Please……save him.'
'I can save only one of you' Ena told him calmly. 'Your injuries are severe. You *may* survive…if you are lucky.'
'Save him' Reuben whispered. 'Save him…'
Ena smiled, giggling as she knelt beside Aski's dead body.
'In that case' she said reaching for him, 'I will obey your wish.' Her smile grew wider as she bared her teeth. 'I give life' she said, 'and I take life away.'

Jaspin and Gael returned a short time later. Ena was waiting for them, with Lilith standing silently by her side.
Aski still lay where he was, having not woken yet, and Reuben lay a short distance away.
For the moment, he was still alive. Ena had put him into a sleep to ease his pain, and help him heal naturally, though she did not know if it would be enough to save him.
'We have to leave this place soon' Ena told, Jaspin, Gael and Lilith. 'There is nothing for us here now.'
'Did you find what you were looking for?' Jaspin asked her. 'The thing you were waiting for? The person?'
'Yes' Ena replied sombrely, 'and it is as I thought before. I know how to cure the sickness, but it is not going to be easy, and great sacrifices must be made.' She regarded each of the three angles before her. 'Are you willing to make these sacrifices?'
'Yes' Jaspin replied, without question. 'Whatever the sacrifices are.'
'Yes' Gael added. 'I will follow you no matter what.'

Ena turned to Lilith, waiting for her answer.
'I will follow you' Lilith finished. 'You are all I have left now.'
Ena nodded her head to Lilith slowly, holding her hands folded together before her.
'Your co-operation is greatly appreciated' she said to Lilith. 'I knew for a moment that you doubted, but now…I hope you understand.'
'I have never seen such magic before' Lilith mumbled.
Ena turned away, gazing about at the dead holy men around them.
'For the longest time' Lilith continued, 'I did not even believe in magic.'
Ena turned back to her. 'You yourself are a magical creature' Ena said. 'How could you ever have thought such a thing?'
'I was a different person back then' Lilith replied meekly, 'living in a different time.'
Ena reached for her then, stroking her face.
'I know' Ena whispered, running her fingers over Lilith's scars. 'I see it written on you.'
She drew back from her, speaking in a harsher tone now.
'I know how to cure the sickness' she told them again. 'But first, we need to get as many people to join us as we can, before anything else…you' she said addressing Jaspin, who raised his head. 'You will find the false one. Find her, and kill her. Gael' she spoke to him. 'You will stay with me.' Ena smiled then, touching her own body that was bruised. 'I am strong' Ena whispered, speaking almost as if to herself. 'I am strong, but at the same time…I am frail…….Lilith' Ena said straightening. 'I need a favour of you.'
'Anything' Lilith replied swiftly.
'I need to borrow your body.'
Lilith tensed slightly. '….what?'
'It's just a temporary arrangement' Ena spoke casually. 'I am weak now. I've spent too much of my powers……it would take years for me to be able to use this much magic again. My powers…manifest, but I have my limit.' She bowed her head. 'I'm nearly spent, but I have a little left, just a little…left for this.'
Ena giggled.
'You would be posing as me. You would be in danger. I would be unable to protect myself in my current state; it would take very little to kill me now. I will hide and recover with Gael, while you and Jaspin hunt the false one, Aski will go with you, and help you when he recovers, and Reuben…' she trailed off as her eyes lingered on him. 'He will find us later if he survives his injures.' She returned her sights back to the angels before her. 'You must stop Freya, before she gains too much support. And while I recover, I will try to gain support for our cause. The more who follow us, the more we can save when the time comes.' She tilted her head at Lilith. 'I need your protection. I need your body, and I can do this easily' Ena said to her. 'All I need is your permission.'
Lilith swallowed the lump in her throat, feeling suddenly nervous as she realised she was the centre of everyone's attention. Either side of her, Jaspin and Gael waited, waiting with silent expectation, all waiting on her word.
'I could not refuse' Lilith found herself saying. 'Do what you want with me.'
Ena grinned widely. 'Close your eyes.'
Lilith did so. The next time she opened them, she giggled.

Lilith looked down at herself, feeling suddenly disoriented.
Standing opposite, facing her, was Ena, in her own body now.
Ena twirled, flicking back her hair.
'Your beautiful white hair is now mine' Ena teased, winking at her and giggling.
Lilith looked at her hands, seeing her long and slender fingers, before straightening again.
'This is going to take a while to get used to' Jaspin mumbled into his hand, glancing at the both of them.
'It's just a temporary measure' Ena assured Lilith. 'I promise.'
'Of course' Lilith nodded, tucking a strand of her long pale hair behind her ear.
This is so strange the thought casually to herself, still feeling unsettled. She still had not adjusted to the change, having not fully registered it yet, she acted as if nothing much had happened.
'What do we do now?' Lilith asked Ena.
Ena who had been twirling on the spot, admiring her new body, Lilith's body, stopped suddenly. She stood tall, folding her hands neatly before her and holding them there.
'Now' Ena spoke sincerely, 'we part ways.'

A short while later, Jaspin and Lilith stood side by side outside the temple. The dead bodies of the holy men Ena had killed with her spell were scattered all around them, but to the angels, were as much a concern as the ivy that grew on the walls. Even Lilith barely noticed them now.
'When will we see each other again?' Jaspin asked, as Gael climbed into the saddle behind Ena, holding her from behind as she gripped the reins of her beloved horse Vanity.
'I don't know' Ena admitted, as Gael watched them in silence. 'I need my people, I need my supporters.'
'I don't want you do go' Jaspin breathed.
Lilith glanced to him. Normally Jaspin had control of himself, but his voice wavered slightly as he spoke, and Lilith saw the crack in his mask. She felt a pang in her heart too, turning back to Ena.
'Will you be safe?' Jaspin asked.
'My people will protect me' Ena spoke confidently. 'And besides…' she glanced back to Gael sitting behind, 'I have my own guardian.'
Jaspin bowed his head, stepping back.
'We will not see each other' Ena said to them, tapping her heels into Vanity and moving onwards, 'not for a long while.'
'Goodbye friends' were Gael's parting words. 'I hope we meet again.' He looked back at them one last time. 'Please stay alive.'

Chapter Thirty
Pursuit

Jaspin and Lilith walked away, returning to the temple.

Ena and Gael were gone now, riding beneath the rising sun, and the bronze sky.
‘I feel so alone’ Lilith spoke up, hugging herself mournfully. ‘I never realised how much of an attachment I had to Ena.’
‘I know’ Jaspin glanced to her as they treaded the stone paths within the gardens. ‘I feel the same.’
Lilith stopped then, Jaspin who had continued to walk, paused, turning back to her.
‘Why do I feel this way?’ Lilith asked Jaspin. ‘I know I've made my choice. And I will stick by it and be loyal to Ena. But I don’t understand this attachment I feel for her. I feel such a strong pull towards her, love even…though I barely know her….’ she broke off then. ‘It’s stronger than the attachment I feel for you.’
Jaspin walked back to her, taking her chin and lifting her head gently up.
‘The attachment we feel for her, is a natural bond angels have to their mother, their goddess….the earth maiden. Angels experience a natural bond and attachment to others of their own kind, more so if the two are bound together, as we are.’ He brushed Lilith’s long green hair back as he said this. ‘But the earth maiden is everything we are and more. We would be nothing without her.’
He drew his hand back briefly, before stepping forward, and embracing Lilith firmly.
‘I love you’ he said to her. ‘Never forget that.’
Lilith stared up at the sky as he held her. She raised her long arms, holding him back. It felt strange to do so. Before she had been a little shorter than him, now in Ena’s body, she towered over him.
‘Come on’ Jaspin said stepping back. ‘We cannot waste time. Each minute we stay, the false one moves further away.’
‘We are really to kill her?’ Lilith asked sadly.
‘Yes’ Jaspin replied without hesitation. ‘It must be this way.’
‘It’s just so sad though’ Lilith mumbled to the ground. ‘She’s just a girl.’

‘We are both needed for the spell’ Ena said back to Gael as he held her on the horse, walking forwards as a gentle pace. ‘For the spell that will save us from the sickness. Freya and I.’
‘If she is needed’ Gael asked her, ‘then why are you trying to kill her?’
Ena faltered. She giggled then, looking down at herself. ‘I like this body’ she said. ‘It doesn’t hurt.’
Ena looked up then across the open plains they traversed. ‘The journey will be long.’ She fell silent for a moment, before speaking again. ‘Freya and I, are two pieces of a whole, we are both needed… Freya will help me…even if she does not know it.’

‘I'm sorry Lilith’ Jaspin said to her. ‘I really am. But if I find her, I will kill her….if I can.’
‘I understand’ Lilith nodded.
‘Now we cannot waste any more time’ Jaspin hastened as he walked away. ‘We have to leave quickly.’

They hurried back into the temple, stepping over the bodies of the holy men which to them were nothing but part of the scenery.
They returned to the hall where they had encountered Freya, the hall in which Reuben and Aski still lay.
Lilith meandered around the bodies as they headed towards Aski.
'Is he alright?' Lilith asked as Jaspin knelt before him.
'He is alive and breathing' Jaspin answered shortly. 'Other than that I don't know. But Ena said she had saved him, she said he would be alright.'
Jaspin grabbed Aski by the arm, pulling him up and lifting him over his shoulder, rising and carrying him. As he did this Lilith went over to Reuben, standing over him.
'Leave him' Jaspin ordered. 'We cannot bring him.'
'He may die' Lilith mumbled.
'Yes' Jaspin mumbled. 'He may die. His life is up to chance now. He *may* survive. But if we try to move him, it would only worsen his injuries.'
'I wish he would wake' Lilith mourned, gazing down at him. 'I wish we could say goodbye. This may be the last time we see him.'
Jaspin glanced over to her, holding Aski over his shoulder.
'Come on' he told her. 'We have to go.'
Lilith cast one last look back at Reuben, before turning her back on him and walking away, following Jaspin out of the hall.

They left the temple, heading around the back and to the small stables that were there.
Jaspin lifted Aski onto the horse, and Lilith mounted the saddle behind him, holding his unconscious body with one arm around his waist, holding the reins with one hand.
'You're not coming with me?' Lilith asked Jaspin as he moved away, towards the centre of the courtyard they were in.
'No' Jaspin replied, not looking at her.
The sky was growing brighter. The bronze had bled out, leaving only the typical blue of a fine summer's day. It we going to be warm, the nights chill was already long gone.
'I am going on ahead' Jaspin smiled at Lilith. 'I can feel her trail' Jaspin tilted his head back to the clouds. 'But its fading fast. I must be quick' he said, unfurling his wings. 'I will return to you' Jaspin said, beginning to beat his wings black and white wings.
'How will you find me?' Lilith raised her voice to him.
'We are bound together' Jaspin smiled. 'I will find you.'
He leapt into the air, ascending quickly and flying away.
Lilith watched him go, feeling strangely alone. Ena had left her, and now Jaspin too. The angels were gone. All she had now as Aski, who still had not come around yet.
'Aski' she whispered into his ear, holding him close. 'Please be ok.'
She turned the horse around, kicking her heels and riding away.
She left the courtyard, riding swiftly away, heading back to the mountains, where there was another temple. The temple in which she and the other angels had met Freya for the first time. It was Freya's home. That is where she would be heading. And so, Lilith travelled this way.

Freya stumbled, holding onto a nearby tree for support, bend doubled over and gasping for breath.
She sighed heavily one last time, before straightening again. She was angry, but the more she thought, the more she realised.
'Things are not so bad' she spoke to herself. She smiled then. 'Ena has spent near enough all of her powers; it will be years before she can manifest such magic again.' Her smile turned into a sneer. 'Ena…you've made yourself weak.'
Her mood changed then, as she remembered the others that had accompanied her to the temple to hunt the angels and earth maiden.
Freya knelt, bowing her head and placing her hands together.
'I'm sorry…' she sobbed, mourning for all the souls that had been lost, the holy figures that had followed her. 'I've led you all to your deaths.'
Her lip quivered, and tears ran down her cheeks.
'I'm sorry…to all of you. You put your faith in me…and I've killed all of you.'
Freya fell into a trance then, as she sent her prayers to those that had been lost. She had known each and every one of them. They had loved her, and she in turn had loved them too.
Some of the men that had been lost, she had known since she was a child. Freya had not been raised by her parents, but by the holy figures. She had spent her entire life in the temple the angels had found her in, and had come to know so much about so many of the holy figures that prayed in the temple.
'I promise your sacrifices will not be in vain. Your deaths have drained this beast of her magic…I will take advantage of this moment when she is weakest. I will find her, and I will kill her. This I promise to all of you.'
She tilted her head back to the bright sky.
'Thank you' she uttered, before rising to her feet and letting her arms fall to her sides. The chained she carried jangled, running from her wrists, to her neck and back.
Freya gazed at the world about her. This beautiful world.
The morning sunlight shone on the little yellow petals of the flowers that shook in the breeze, growing in the tall grass at her feet. Thick and fluffy clouds, bled of all colour from the early morning glow, slid across the sky as white as freshly fallen snow.
The plains around her were relatively flat, and she could see far ahead of her. Just on the other side of the mountains that sat upon the horizon, was her temple home. The one place in the world she felt the safest.
Freya smiled then; a single tear ran down her cheek.
'I pray to god' she sighed, 'that all that I see before me is not lost. I pray to god…that this world exists…for generations to come.'
She wheeled around suddenly, hearing the downwards draft of air as great wings beat close to her. She gritted her teeth, glaring as Jaspin descended, landing lightly.
He straightened, glaring back at her with pure hatred unmasked, and death in his eyes.

Aski began to stir.

He raised his head, blinking wearily. It took his mind several long seconds to make sense of the situation and his surroundings.
He was sitting in a saddle upon a horse, walking at a lazy pace and being held by a figure sitting behind him.
Aski glanced around, recognising the figure or Ena, slumped in the saddle behind him with head hung and eyes closed.
'….Ena?'
The figure opened her eyes, raising her head. She had only been resting.
'Aski?' she sounded just as surprised as he did. 'You're alright.'
Aski stared at her hard for several seconds, before lifting his leg over the horse's neck and sliding from the saddle. His feet hit the ground and he whipped around to face her, backing away angrily from her.
'You're not the earth maiden' he spoke harshly, his voice filled with accusation. 'You're not her. You feel wrong. Who are you and why do you have her face?'
'Aski' Lilith spoke to him calmly, turning the horse towards him and leaning forwards in the saddle. 'It's me.'
Aski stared at her hard, body still rigid and muscles tense.
'Lilith?' he relaxed then, straightening. 'Is it really you?'
Lilith smiled then, tilting her head. 'You can feel my being' she sighed. 'So it's not just the earth maiden we angels can feel, but each other too…'
'What happened?' Aski asked her, stepping closer to her as Lilith dismounted the horse.
'I…' Lilith bowed her head. 'You died Aski. You were dead. I touched you….you were cold.'
Lilith glanced at Aski then, seeing his eyes wide and glazed over, mouth half open and expression a frown.
'I died' Aski whispered, speaking in a distant voice. 'I remember…I remember being in a place…….' He furrowed his brow, '…it was bliss…'
Lilith moved closer to him, placing a gentle hand upon his arm.
'What was it like?' she asked him gently. 'What did you see?'
'That place' Aski spoke, turning his head away from her. 'It was like a place in my dreams. There was no wind, and yet the tall grass at my feet danced back and forth. The little blue flowers shone like jewels and stretched for as far as my eyes could see. It was sunny, yet there was no warmth, and the water in the lake I had found, was as still as glass, mirroring the sky above…but when I touched it…the water rippled, before falling still again.'
'Perhaps it was only in your mind' Lilith suggested, drawing her hand back.
'Yes' Aski mumbled. 'Yes…perhaps you're right.' He looked at her now. 'What happened?' he asked. 'I remember fighting with the holy men, and then….my memory fails me. I remember the violence…then I remember nothing….save for the dream of that strange place.'
'The earth maiden used her magic to kill the holy men' Lilith explained meekly. 'She killed them all.'
Aski glanced back at her, becoming suddenly tense again. 'She used that much magic…? That is dangerous for her.'

‘There was no other way I am sure’ Lilith said. ‘They would have killed all of us…would have killed her.’ Lilith trailed off then. ‘It was her choice.’
‘Tch.’ Aski ground his teeth glaring. ‘Curse this. We were foolish and lazy to allow them to trap us so. But it will not happen again. We let our guard down…but once only.’
‘I regret the way things turned out also’ Lilith confessed, hugging herself.
‘So why do you look like Ena?’ Aski asked her.
‘Ena asked this of me. For her own safety, I agreed to let her have my body while she goes into hiding, while she gathers support for our cause.’
‘So she found the figure she was looking for?’
‘Yes.’
‘I see. So…where are the others?’
‘Gael went away with Ena alone. Reuben…chose to save you at risk of his own life. I don’t know if he is alive. I don’t know if he has made it. Ena said she could save only one of you. Reuben insisted that it be you.’
‘I see’ Gael mumbled.
‘It was too risky to move him. We had to leave quickly to hunt for Freya.’
‘Ena…must have used a lot of magic…she is weak now, even more so for saving Reuben…but Freya is still strong.’ He straightened then. ‘Is that what we’re doing now? Seeking out the false one?’
‘Yes. Jaspin has gone ahead to find her. He said he will kill her.’
‘I thought as much.’ Aski went silent for a moment. ‘I've just realised something’ he said, staring at Lilith. ‘In that body…you won’t be able to fly.’
Lilith’s heart tightened in her chest.
‘Oh gods…’ she mumbled. ‘I hadn't thought of that…’

A while later, and the two came to rest.
‘Are you feeling alright?’ Lilith questioned.
‘Why do you ask?’
‘You died’ Lilith told Aski meekly. ‘Why wouldn’t I ask?’
Aski touched his own chest. ‘I feel fine’ he said. ‘Though I know it’s strange…’
They rested on the grass out in the open plains. There was nothing around them, nothing, save for rolling hills, and in the greater distance, the town they were heading for, the town they would rest, before journeying onwards towards Freya’s temple home.
‘I hate being so exposed’ Aski grumbled. ‘It feels so unsafe. People may see us from miles away.’
‘It’s alright’ Lilith comforted, sitting on the grass and hugging her knees. ‘If they can see us, then we can see them.’
‘We’ve nowhere to tie the horse’ Aski noted.
‘If it wanders, we will find it and bring it back.’
Aski turned to her. He looked as if he were about to say something, then decided against it.
Several seconds passed, and he decided to speak.
‘Doesn’t it feel strange?’ Aski said. ‘Being the way you are now.’
Lilith didn’t answer him at first; instead she bowed her head, eyes becoming distant.
‘I never realised how much pain Ena was in all the time.’

‘….what?’
‘When she performed the spell that killed the holy men, she used too much magic…too much energy, and the strength was drained out of her. She collapsed, and when she fell, the entire half of her body was badly damaged.’ Lilith pulled back the skirt of her dress to reveal her skin. Her entire left leg where she had fallen was badly bruised, and the other leg was bruised also, but not so bad. One side of her face was still bruised; her body and chest were damaged also. ‘Ena is powerful, and yet so frail.’ Lilith lowered the skirt of her dress. ‘But is not just that.’ she hugged herself. ‘I feel…a great pain within this body. But I don’t think it’s a pain caused by the fall, it’s…this body.’ She grimaced then. ‘My heart hurts with every beat. It’s hard to breath. I feel fatigue…and short of breath easily, even though I've done very little, even though I've been in this body for only a short time.’ Lilith held her hands together, clutching her long fingers over her heart. ‘My back and shoulders hurt. My arms, hands and feet feel so cold…always….and my eyes…’ her hands came to her face then. ‘This vision is blurred, and I can only see things are close to me.’ She went quiet then. ‘I never knew how much pain Ena was in, and she never once complained.’
Aski gave her a strange expression, listening silently. He approached Lilith when she had finished speaking, sitting close beside her.
Lilith turned to him, observing, seeing his long black hair swept back, his light blue eyes and pale skin. Her attention drifted down then to his slender body, seeing a thing around his neck.
‘What is that?’
‘Oh this?’ Aski said, picking up the necklace and looking closely at this. The shining red stone glistened in the setting sun. ‘This is a thing that is very dear to me.’
He brought it to his lips, closing his eyes. For a moment he seemed to be far away, but then he opened his eyes again.
Aski tucked the jewel beneath his shirt and spoke.
‘I was married once’ Aski told her. ‘I had a family…but the woman I loved…my life…the only reason I saw to keep on living…was taken away from me.’
‘How?’ Lilith asked tentatively.
‘The sickness’ Aski breathed. He patted his chest where the necklace was. ‘The jewel’ he began slowly. ‘It’s…the infected blood from her body.’ He hesitated. ‘I've been told that…there are people…incredible people somewhere in this world…that could bring her back to life…back to the way she was….that’ he said turning away, ‘is the only reason I….’ he trailed off.
‘I'm sorry’ Lilith whispered, hugging her knees to her chest. ‘I shouldn’t pry.’
‘It’s alright’ Aski smiled, turning back to her. ‘I don’t mind.’
A silence passed between them. The horse had wandered a short distance from them, head lowered to the grass and eating.
‘Aski’ Lilith began. ‘What's it like to have a family that loves you? What's it like…to have a partner that loves you for who you are?’
Aski lifted his head, looking around to her.
When Lilith met his gaze, Aski saw there were tears in her eyes.
‘Lilith…’
She lurched forwards suddenly, grasping her body tightly and groaning.
‘Lilith!’ Aski cried, panic in his voice now. ‘What…?’

Lilith threw her head back and screamed.

Jaspin fell to his knees, pulling the sharpened branch from his body, though it had caused him no pain, he knew, as he thought with regret, that Lilith would be feeling all of this.
They were bound together.
'You are persistent' Freya said curtly, standing before him a short distance away.
Jaspin grimaced, rising to his feet and standing tall again. 'I'm going to rip you limb from limb.'
'Just you try it.'
The skin around Jaspin's eye twitched as he felt a sliver of anger coursing through him.
'I'm going to kill you' Jaspin told her calmly.
'You can try' Freya said to him. 'Last time I would not defend myself because I believed foolishly that one of you might change. But I know now that you are all as bad as each other, you are all evil. All of you must go.' She took a step away, standing with her side to him and sweeping back her short blonde hair. 'I am stronger than you take me for. I do not believe you can defeat me.'
Jaspin balled his fists, summoning his magic to him.
'I *won't* let you escape' Freya raised a hand to her. 'You are all going to die.'
Jaspin lunged for her, cutting the air as he tore forwards, wings spread out wide.
Freya ducked and rolled to the side in perfect time, missing his stroke.
Jaspin wheeled around to face her, throwing his wings back as Freya leapt out of reach, before attacking him in turn.

Lilith screamed again, curled up and holding herself.
Aski watched her helplessly in her agony, trying his best to comfort her, though she barely seemed to hear him.
After a time, she seemed to calm.
Aski stared, kneeling beside her as she lay on her side on the ground, gasping heavily; body trembling.
And then she began to cry.
'It's too much' she whispered through her tears. 'I…I can't take it…'
Aski clenched his teeth, grasping the dirt beside him.
'What can I do?' he asked her. 'Oh Lilith…' he reached for her, pushing her pale green hair back from her body. 'I'm sorry……I wish things were different for us. I wish we didn't have to suffer like this……I wish the other angels were alive…I wish we hadn't been forced into this….but most of all….' he smiled sadly then, tears running down his own cheeks. 'I wish there was no sickness…'
He bent forwards then, gathering up Lilith's long hair as tidily as he could, before lifting her in his arms and walking.
Lilith, overcome with exhaustion was limp in his arms, but aware of everything still happening around her.

‘Aski…’ she uttered, her voice breaking as she spoke. ‘I don’t…I don’t think I can live like this….if I have to stay in this body for long….’ The muscles in her face twitched. ‘I'm going to die…’
‘No’ Aski said to her. ‘Don’t think things like that.’
Lilith whimpered, closing her eyes.
‘It’s going to be alright’ Aski told her. ‘There is a town just before us’ he said. ‘It’s large; there must be an inn there somewhere.’
Lilith didn’t speak.
Aski looked to her as he carried her.
‘….Lilith?’
‘You…’ she mumbled. ‘You should be resting yourself. You.....…you…….’ she began to tremble.
‘I know what happened to me’ he said. ‘I know. But I feel myself again. I feel strong.’
‘At least, let the horse carry me.’
Aski paused then, glancing back to the horse that had followed them.
He returned to the beast, lifting Lilith into the saddle. She groaned as she straightened, slumping forwards again and resting on the creature’s neck.
‘It’s not far’ Aski told her, taking the reins and leading the animal. ‘Just try to relax. Please.’
Lilith supported herself in the saddle, one hand resting on the horse’s mane, the other limp and hanging.
‘We’ll be there soon enough’ Aski reassured her. ‘You're going to be alright. I promise.’
Lilith didn’t answer. Her eyes were only half open, and distant.
Her mind was far away.
As they walked, Lilith’s hair which Aski had gathered together, had unravelled. It had fallen now, hanging to one side of the horse as they trudged onwards. The long pale strands of green lifting in the light breeze as the three journeyed onwards, nearly touching the ground.
‘We’ll be there soon’ Aski repeated. ‘Just stay with me. Alright?’
Lilith didn’t answer.
She let out a sigh, and closed her eyes.
The next she opened her eyes; she was in another place, with Aski by her side.

Lilith sat up, pushing herself off the bed.
Aski who had been sitting on the edge of the bed with his back to her turned, hearing her movement.
‘How do you feel?’ he asked her tentatively.
Lilith stared at him blankly. Her attention drifted past him, and to the room around.
They were in a small room, both resting on a double bed. The walls were wooden panelled, and the window was large, set out of the room and overlooking the street below, with a little wooden bench below the sill and cushions to sit on.
It was a simple room, with very little décor. The dark room was lit by only two burning lamps attached to the wall either side of the bed. And outside, the dark town was lit by the street lamps, lined along every path.
‘It’s late’ Aski spoke to her in a quiet voice. ‘You’ve been out cold for a while. I…tried to speak to you…but you wouldn’t wake.’

‘You carried me all this way?’
‘Yes’ Aski bowed his head.
‘Where’s the horse?’
‘Safe.’
Lilith hugged herself. ‘Thank you.’ Lilith tensed suddenly as s thought struck her. ‘Where is Jaspin?’ she asked. ‘Has he come back yet?’
Aski stared at her. ‘No’ he answered at last. ‘I…haven’t seen him.’
He must still be fighting the false earth maiden Lilith thought. *Oh god…….I hope he’s alright.*

Jaspin groaned, grabbing the thick root that had wound its way around his neck and held him there. His hands shook as he tried to free himself, growling through bloodied teeth.
‘I knew you would underestimate me’ Freya spoke calmly, standing before him with arms crossed.
He sneered at her then, contorting his body. But more roots had tightened themselves around his limbs and torso, all at *her* command. Despite being a shadow of the true thing, she false one still had considerable powers of her own.
‘We’ve been fighting for far too long’ Freya mumbled turning away, speaking now as if to herself. ‘You are strong, but not as strong as me.’ Freya looked back at him. ‘I know what your plan is. You cannot kill me alone, so your plan is to tire me out.’
‘It’s working’ Jaspin moaned, closing an eye as he fought against his binds still. ‘You're right. I cannot kill you on my own; I've not the power…but together…my brethren…the other angels….’
Freya tilted her head at him then, conveying the same curiosity towards him as a feline would to a poor soul it was just about to kill.
‘Think about how much pain you must have caused dear Lilith. I know the two of you are bound together.’
Jaspin started then, unable to keep the look of shock from his expression. It had not left his mind, but the fact spoken clearly…and the fact that Freya knew…
‘Anyway…’ Freya continued, moving towards him and reaching for a shaft of wood as she did, a thin and straight tree branch sticking from the ground. ‘I've had enough of this. You won’t bother me anymore.’
She stopped before him, lifting the branch before her and moving the flat of her hand across the end. Part of the branch broke away, leaving a sharp point.
Jaspin was unable to protect himself, leaning back against the base of the tree, held to the ground by the trunks and exposed.
‘Downwards through the shoulder’ Freya mumbled, lifting the spear with the point facing downwards towards his flesh, ‘through the shoulder, through the heart.’
She drew a sharp intake of breath, drawing the spear back sharply and plunging it downwards.
Jaspin’s eyes widened and he gasped, fearing not his own death, but what might happen to Lilith, for even he didn’t know.
Freya thrust the spear downwards, but without warning it shattered in her hands.

Freya and Jaspin both stared in confusion, and then Freya leapt back, as a figure appeared between them.
'What's this?' Freya hissed, raising an arm to shield herself. 'Who are you?'
The new figure who stood facing Freya, peered around then to see Jaspin, before looking forwards again.
The entire profile was black, and at the face there rested a plague mask, with round eyes like windows behind which was only blackness.
'You must not kill this one' spoke a voice from behind the mask, a female voice. 'He is needed most of all.'
'It's you….' Jaspin groaned, clawing at the bark that held him, '….why?'
The masked figure turned to face him now.
'We believe in your cause' the strange woman spoke. 'You must not be allowed to die at this time.'
The masked woman reached for him, touching her gloved fingertips to the roots that constricted around him.
The material of the wood crumbled and fell away, becoming only dust.
'You must be more careful' the masked female said to Jaspin as he rose unsteadily to his feet. 'You've caused Lilith much pain.'
'What are you doing here?' Freya called out to the women. 'Are you here to hurt me too?!'
'I care not for you' the stranger replied curtly. 'Do what you will, run if you like, but I will not let you hurt this one.'
Freya lingered for a moment longer in uncertainty, before her profile flickered. She used her magic and fled.
Freya was gone.
'You've been careless' the masked figure noted, standing before Jaspin with her arms hanging by her sides.
Jaspin leant against the tree behind him, clawing at the wood behind as he fixated on this strange being.
'What will do now?' the woman asked him.
'I will hunt the false one and kill her.'
'Even now?' the masked female asked him, sounding amused now. 'She would have killed you if I had not stopped it.'
'I…' Jaspin began.
'If you pursue her, then the next time you might now be so lucky.'
'Sacrifices must be made.'
'That indeed is true' the woman said folding her arms and cocking her head playfully at him. 'I will not try to stop you or influence your decision. So?' she smiled behind her mask. 'What will you do?'
'I have her' Jaspin breathed. 'She is close. I cannot lose her now.'
'Determination' the woman said. 'Willingness not to give up.' She nodded. 'It is a good trait. However it might not always work in your advantage.'
She glided away from him, heading into the trees, pausing for a moment to regard him, before moving on without a word.

Chapter Thirty One
The Pyre

Aski had gone away now, saying he would be back soon.
Lilith remained lying on the bed, feeling utterly exhausted despite her long sleep.
She thanked the gods the pains had ceased, the ones she had been receiving from Jaspin anyway. The old pains she suffered within this body still remained, but at least she could rest.
She stayed here for some time, before deciding the rise.
Lilith pushed herself off the bed, sitting up.
It was daylight outside. The lamps on the wall either side of her no longer burned, and in the street outside she could hear the familiar murmur and rolling of carriage wheels on cobbled streets that signalled normal life. Once upon a time, she lived in a town, and before that she lived in a city, in the capital. With her father.
'How much things have changed since then' Lilith mumbled.
For a time she had forgotten what had happened, but as she gazed down at herself, she remembered that she belonged in this new and strange body now.
A wave of sadness washed over her, and she buried her face in her hands, crying silently, before straightening then, lifting her head as another thought dawned on her.
....Jaspin……
Lilith crawled off the bed, rising to her feet and standing. It still felt peculiar. She was not used to being this tall; she was in a young body, younger by far than her own. But she was easily a head taller than the average person, and so skinny.
Lilith hugged herself then, bowing her head as her lip trembled, fighting back tears.
How long must I endure this? She thought. *Where are the others?*
She lowered her arms, padding quietly around the bed and towards the door.
She reached out and grasped the handle, opening it slowly and seeing what was outside.
Beyond the door was a wooden hallway. A balustrade was before her overlooking the level below, and as she stepped out further, she saw doors lined up either side of the one she had come from. Other rooms no doubt. The inn she had found herself in seemed largish in size, and warm. Lilith knew instantly that many people were staying here. There were people strolling down the hallway either side of her, and she could hear the quiet murmur of guests on the level below as they ate and drank, circled around the tables of sitting at the bar.
The two people that had been walking the corridor either side of her, both gave her strange looks as they passed. One of them stopped, giving her an unfriendly look, a look Lilith recognised as predatory.
'I've not see you around here before' the stranger said to her, as the other man walked past her.
Lilith felt a twinge of nervousness then, realising she was alone and in a body that was fragile, feeling suddenly self-conscious, with her height, skinny body and long pale green hair that reached her ankles. She didn't know this town, or the people who lived here. But she

knew that no matter where you went, the strong would try to take advantage of the weak. As was the way of the world.
'I'm just a guest here' Lilith replied to the man, speaking quietly.
'You came here alone?'
Lilith swallowed the lump in her throat.
The man stared at her, as if waiting for an answer.
He stepped toward her. Lilith suddenly frightened took a sharp step back; then she remembered herself.
'I'm sorry sir' Lilith sighed. 'It's so hard for a girl like me to be alone in the world. I came here with a companion. But I don't know when he will be back. I fear that he might have left me.' she fixed him with pleading eyes. 'I am so frightened here. I've never been in this place before…I feel so lost.'
The man smirked at her as if this amused him.
'Could you tell me more about this place?' Lilith asked tentatively.
'We're in Tredwhit. It's a town.'
For the briefest of moments, Lilith thought the man was going to elaborate. He didn't.
'Why do you have green hair?' the man asked her, reaching forwards and touching.
Lilith averted her eyes as the man ran a section of her long hair through his fingers.
'So strange.' The man narrowed his eyes. 'You look like…..'
Lilith's eyes flashed then. *I cannot be recognised like this*. She swooped up to the man, taking him in her arms and kissing him.
The man was so shocked, he did not resist. But after a few seconds, he began to kiss her back.
I'm sorry Ena Lilith thought as she felt his tongue inside her. *I'm sorry…*
Her hand slipped around his body, snaking into his pocket as she did.
Another hand grabbed her by the arm then, jerking her sharply back and causing her to stumble.
It took Lilith several seconds to register what had just happened, but by that time, Aski had already pulled Lilith back and punched the man, attacking him in the hallway. He was aggressive, grabbing the bemused looking man by the shirt and shoving him against the wall snarling, his face inches away from the man's.
'You touch her again and I'll fucking kill you. You hear me?'
The man didn't answer, only stared back in shock.
Aski pulled the man towards him, shoving him away down the corridor.
'Get out of here' Aski ordered the man, turning before he saw whether or not the man would comply, he grabbed Lilith firmly by the wrist, dragging her back to their room and slamming the door after them.
He rounded on her.
'What the hell are you doing?' he hissed to her, baring his teeth in pure rage. 'How could you violate Ena's body like that?'
Tears prickled in Lilith's eyes as she saw Aski tremble with fury, and for a moment she was overcome with sadness.
'He recognised me…' she sobbed, 'He…he recognised me…'
Aski grabbed her by the face then with one hand, forcing her head towards his.

‘If you ever…’ Aski spoke dangerously quietly, ‘…*ever*…do anything like that again….’ he went quiet then, eyes beginning to twitch. ‘I swear to god I will kill you myself.’
‘I'm sorry…’ Lilith whispered, tears spilling down her cheeks. ‘I’m…I'm sorry…’
Aski let go of her, drawing his hand back slowly.
He gasped, looking shocked.
Lilith started, confused at his reaction.
Aski grimaced, turning sharply away from her and stomping over to the window, sitting on the bench below the glass and staring out at the street beyond.
Lilith turned slowly towards the wall, gazing at her own reflection.
Aski had only touched her for a moment, but already there was a bruise on her face where he had grasped her. She saw this in the mirror, and as she looked down at her wrist, she saw a bruise there where he had grasped her too.
Lilith’s face contorted with grief, but she was determined to keep back these new tears.
This body… she thought, *is too fragile. Will I survive this?*
She went over to the bed where she had spent hours lying on, descending onto the sheets and closing her eyes.
Aski by the window, cast a glance over to her, before turning away again, looking back outside.

It was several hours later, that Lilith cried out in agony.
Aski who had not moved from the window tensed suddenly, shocked at the hours of silence being so suddenly and sharply broken.
He rushed up to her, leaning over her on the bed.
‘Lilith! What's wrong?’
‘My wings’ Lilith sobbed, writhing in agony on the bed. ‘They hurt!’
‘You don’t have-’
His sentence was cut off when she screamed again. Automatically he clapped his hands over her mouth.
‘Lilith please!’ he begged.
But she barely seemed to notice him, he screams muffled now as he held her tightly.
‘Lilith?’
She fought to get away from him.
He moved his leg over her, sitting on her stomach now as she fought to keep her silent, beginning to cry himself as panic consumed him.
‘Lilith please….*please* be quiet. They will find us!’

He held her for nearly an hour before she fell silent again, removing his hand tentatively, and leaving behind a bruise that covered her entire jaw.
He left the room quickly after that, leaving Lilith alone to rest and locking the door after him.
He returned shortly after, waking Lilith by shaking her gently.
‘Hey’ he whispered. ‘Wake up.’
Lilith sat up.

‘I've got something for you.’ Aski produced a small bottle from his pocket. The bottle was black and the label small. Lilith couldn’t see it properly, her sight was failing her. ‘It will help with the pain’ Aski said. ‘Please take it.’
‘How did you pay for this?’ Lilith mumbled staring at it.
‘You had a small pouch of money on you’ Aski explained. ‘I used that.’
‘It’s the money you stole from that man’ Lilith whispered.
‘Here’ Aski spoke quietly to her. ‘Drink this. It will put you to sleep.’
Lilith reached for the small bottle, but it slipped from her hands as she tried to unscrew it. Aski caught it before it fell.
‘It’s alright’ he spoke soothingly, undoing the cap for her.
He held the back of her head with one hand as he helped her drink, bringing the bottle to her lips.
‘Drink all of it’ he said, and Lilith did so, covering her mouth and coughing as the thick and sticky liquid ran down her throat, burning her.
Aski poured her a class of water from the just beside the bed, handing it do her.
Lilith didn’t even remember drinking it, but she supposed that she must have done. The drugs she had been given was strong, and she slept deeply for a long time after that.
The next she woke, it was morning, earlier than it had been the last she knew.
She didn’t know how long she had been asleep, but she knew it must have been for a long while.
She pushed herself up, sitting up in bed and looking around.
Aski, perhaps hearing her movement, stepped into the room from the next.
‘I've run a bath for you’ he told her. ‘There’s a new dress for you hanging on the back of the door’ he indicated. ‘There’s soap and towels and everything you need.’ He paused to regard her. ‘When was the last time you washed?’
‘It’s been far too long’ Lilith answered meekly back, still wearing Ena’s white dress from days ago. ‘I would very much appreciate a bath…thank you.’
Aski nodded silently to her.
Lilith swung her legs over the edge of the bed, gingerly rising to stand.
Aski stepped back as she hobbled forwards towards the washroom.
He turned to watch her as she closed the door behind her. This room was small, with only a wooden bath in the centre and a few cupboards in the corners.
There was a slender black dress hanging on a hook on the back of the door, with a long skirt, the shoulders covered and of a basic design, with a slit at the front of the skirt to make riding easier.
Lilith looked over it only briefly, before sailing away, drifting across the room and towards the wooden bath.
She slipped the filthy white dress off her shoulders, lowering herself tentatively into the bath.
It was warm, not too hot for her, it was perfect.
Lilith leant back against it, allowing her body to relax.
She sighed, tilting her head to the side and resting her cheek against the wood. She was so exhausted, that she didn’t even notice the tears running down her cheeks as she slipped into a gentle sleep.
She was woken sometime later by a heavy knock at the door.

‘Lilith!’ It was Aski’s voice. ‘Are you alright in there?’
She had woken with a start, and mentally gathered herself before answering.
‘Y-yes’ she called back. ‘I'm alright. I’ll be out in a minute.’
The water was cold now. She washed her long hair and her body quickly before getting out and draining the water away. She left the white dress on the floor where it was, putting on the black one.
It felt good to be clean again, and her mood picked up a little.
Aski lifted his head when she opened the door, watching as she stepped back into the bedroom.
‘How do you feel?’
‘Well enough I suppose.’ Lilith patted her skirt flat. ‘Thank you for the dress’ she said meekly.
‘Thank yourself’ Aski replied. ‘I used the money you stole.’
He rose from the bed, pulling back the chair by the wall and indicating for her to sit. Lilith did so without protest or question.
Aski walked around her, taking her long hair and pulling it behind her. He brought out a soft brush and began to brush her hair gently.
‘Aski?’ Lilith spoke quietly.
‘Hm?’
‘I’m…I'm sorry about what I did the other day…or whenever it was. I swear I didn’t mean…’
‘It’s ok’ Aski sighed, continuing to brush. ‘Just forget about it.’
‘Where is Jaspin?’
Aski hesitated then. Lilith turned around to face him.
‘You mean he hasn’t come yet?’
‘No.’
‘But…’ Lilith lowered her eyes, lip trembling. She wiped the tears before they could fall. ‘He said he would come.’
‘I’m sorry.’
‘What if he’s in danger’ Lilith worried aloud. ‘What if he needs help? We should try to find him.’
‘We can’t leave.’
‘Why not.’
Aski gritted his teeth, drawing back the hand he had been using to brush her hair.
Lilith looked around to him again.
‘Aski? Why can’t we leave?’
‘This…’ Aski began reluctantly. He sight, before averting his gaze. ‘This is Freya’s territory. They…know we’re here. I'm….afraid.’
Lilith blinked slowly as she listened to him speak. As he did, Lilith saw the fear in his eyes. Her stomach twinged then, and her heart tightened in her chest.
‘I don’t know what to do’ Aski admitted. ‘I don’t know if it’s safe for me to leave this room anymore and…they would surely recognise you…’ His shoulders slumped, and his head hung. ‘I…’ he began. He gritted his teeth, balling his fists in frustration. ‘I don’t want to die.’ His voice broke as he said this, though he couldn’t help himself. ‘If I die again…then…there is no second chance for me.’

‘What about Jaspin?’ Lilith pleaded, as if Aski could have done something to help.
‘I'm sorry’ Aski said, turning to face her. ‘He…may be dead already. He……should have been back by now….one could only assume the worst.’
Lilith stifled a sob then, hand going to her mouth as her body began to tremble, shaking like a leaf.
‘Oh god no……I can’t do this…first Reuben….then….’ Lilith buried her face in her hands. She raised her head, freezing then. ‘What are we going to do?’ she whined.
‘It’s cloudy outside’ Aski replied in a flat tone. ‘It’s going to be a dark night tonight. If we’re going to get away, tonight is our best hope.’
‘I wonder how Ena and Gael are doing’ Lilith mumbled to her knees, folding her hands on her lap before her. ‘I hope they're alright. I hope they're safe and…’ she drew a shuddering breath. ‘I want to see them both again, more than anything.’
‘I know’ Aski said quietly, reaching forwards and continuing to brush her hair. ‘We’ll leave tonight. I promise.’
Lilith didn’t answer. She sat there, silent and still as Aski brushed and dried her long hair. He plated it, and tied it in a neat bun behind her head, held in place by a simple hair stick.
‘There’ he said stepping back. ‘Is that comfortable.’
Lilith’s hand went back to pat her hair. She turned in the seat to face him.
‘Thank you. It feels fine.’
‘I…I've brought us some food’ Aski spoke to the wall. ‘It’s cold. Its only basic but…you must be hungry.’
‘I'm starving.’
They ate quietly on the bed, bread and cheese and dried fruit.
As they ate, Lilith stared down at her wrists.
Aski glanced up at her, noticing this. ‘What's wrong?’
‘I feel like I'm in chained’ she uttered. ‘There is a pressure around my wrists.’
Aski took a swig of wine from the skein, before rising from the bed.
‘We should get some rest.’ He began to clear away the remaining food from the bed, putting it neatly away back in the draw. ‘We’ll leave tonight, when darkness falls.’

Hours passed, and the sun had just dipped below the horizon.
Aski and Lilith lay side by side on the bed, both fast asleep, both utterly still. Until there came a series of sharp bangs on the door. Lilith and Aski both woke with a start, both sitting suddenly bolt upright and staring wide eyed at the door.
‘We know who you are!’ called to them a muffled voice from the other side. ‘We know you're in there!’
‘Shit’ Aski instantly rose to his feet, standing on the bed. ‘Lili-’
But before he could even finish, and door was broken open, banging back on the wall behind.
The men who stood there barely had time to register the occupants within the room, before Aski threw out his hand, casting out his magic.
The men at the door were stunned and blinded. It was a spell that would only work once, and for only a short time. Aski and Lilith had seconds. He grabbed Lilith roughly, pulling her to her feet and dragging her to the window. The glass shattered before he even reached it, and

Aski instantly climbed onto the sill, leaning out into the cold evening, still holding Lilith close to him by the wrist.
'Aski what are you doing?'
He turned to her and picked her up in his arms, his beautiful wings, silver like the moon's light suddenly erupted from his back, becoming trapped in the small space they stood in, filling up the room behind.
'Aski?'
'Now or never' he snapped harshly, hugging her to him, baring his teeth in determination. 'We have to get out of here, or we *die*!'
Lilith gasped in shock as he leapt from the window, feeling so unsteady in his arms, so dependant, so vulnerable.
Aski cast his wings out wide, beating them hard and fast and gaining ground, soaring over rooftops below.
Something whipped past them then, something fast, cutting Aski's cheek as it went, and then another. As Lilith saw the second one shoot past, she recognised it as a bolt from a crossbow.
Aski instantly retracted his wings, landing harder and faster than he intended on the rooftop beneath him.
'Aski what are you doing we have to get away!'
'There's too many of them!' Aski shouted back to her, clutching her thin frame to his chest.
And as Lilith gazed wide-eyed around them, she saw that they were surrounded.
'Do you know' Aski began tentatively, 'about the vein in our wings? If we release our wings, we become more powerful…but…'
'If that vein is cut' Lilith is finished. 'We die.'
Aski glared at her, gritting his teeth in frustration and desperation.
'I'm sorry…I don't know what to do. I thought I could have done it…I thought we could have escaped.'
'It's alright' Lilith sighed, lifting her arms up to hug him. 'You tried.'
Feeling so lost and alone, fearing this might be the end, Aski held her tightly back; as if she were the last thing in the world he might see.
'Stay down fallen angel!' hollered a voice.
Lilith didn't look around, but buried her face in Aski's chest as he rounded towards the figure that had spoken, a royal guard and watchmen, dressed in a heavy black trench coat and wearing a tricorn hat. Around him were other similar figures, and on other rooftops also, and on the ground. All were armed with crossbows.
'Curse them' Aski hissed desperately, gripping Lilith harden. 'Curse them…curse all of them! It was an ambush…we should have left sooner.'
'You could not have known' Lilith comforted. She flinched at his hard grip on her, already feeling bruises forming there, though she didn't complain.
'I'm sorry Lilith…I'm sorry I failed you…failed Ena…'
'Put her down!' one of the watchmen ordered Aski, stepping nearer with crossbow raised.
Aski growled at him.
The watchman reached for Lilith, grabbing her by the upper arm and pulling her towards him.
Aski's eyes flashed. He rounded on the man, swinging his fist as he did and hitting him hard on the side of the head.

The watchman stumbled back, cursing the angel.
'You son of a bitch!'
He started forward to strike Aski.
'No one touch her!' a female voice called out.
The watchman froze suddenly, sword raised high in the air about to strike.
Aski hunched his shoulders, baring his teeth.
Lilith in his arms looked around, searching for the speaker, her heart sinking in her chest as it slowly dawned on her that she recognised the voice.
The owner of the voice made herself known.
Freya lifted up into the air, coming into view. Her purple skirt clung to her as she ascended from the street below, lifting as her magic lowered her downwards. Her tiptoes touched the tiles of the roof lightly, as she landed carefully on the surface below her. The chains running from her neck to wrists jangled, her short blonde hair hung like a curtain around her head, and at her throat, the necklace of two snakes intertwined shone in the evening light, with their tails forming into a spear point.
'I won't let you escape' Freya spoke boldly to the angels. 'You are all going to die.'
'Are you going to kill us?' Aski whispered to her, though there was no fear in his voice, only anger.
'Put her down' Freya turned to him, and Aski did so.
Lilith's feet touched the tiles, and she sunk to her knees.
Freya approached her, going down on a knee before her as she fixated, eyes boring into Lilith's.
Freya rose then, drawing away from Lilith who remained sitting.
'You are not who you appear to be. Tell me.' Freya cocked her head, standing with her feet together and arms folded. 'Where is the one you call Ena?'
'We don't know.'
'Then who are you?'
Lilith hesitated, bowing her head in grief.
'Lilith' she answered reluctantly, seeing no other way.
'Oh' Freya replied flatly. 'So it's you. Tell me where Ena is.'
'We don't know' Aski said. 'And even if we did we would not tell you.'
Freya turned back to the watchmen behind her.
'Put them in the cells.'
'Wait!' Lilith shrieked as one of the men grabbed her. 'Where is Jaspin?!'
Freya didn't answer, she only watched resignedly as Aski fought the guards, trying to keep them away from Lilith, trying to protect her, and himself. But he was outnumbered and out muscled.
One of them grabbed him by the throat, throwing him down and kicking him as he fell.
'Stop it!' Lilith screamed, watching helplessly as the guards attacked him, beating him and kicking him. '*Please* please stop you'll kill him!'
'That is the plan' Freya mumbled in return. 'You have made your choice. There is no going back now.'
'If you kill him' Lilith replied, speaking levelly now, 'you will never know where Ena is.'

Freya raised a hand casually to the watchmen, signalling them to stop, which they did, immediately.
‘We know where she is’ she lied. ‘We know.’
‘Lilith what are you doing?’ Aski groaned, grasping the foot of the man as he pressed his weight upon his throat. ‘Don’t…we don’t know…it’s a lie!’
‘If you know’ Freya said, ‘then I will get it out of you.’ She waved to the watchmen. ‘Take them away.’
Aski was hauled to his feet, as Lilith was lifted by two of the watchmen.
‘Be careful with that one’ Freya told then as they did this. ‘Her body is fragile. It could easily break.’
They were taken away, and locked in separate cells, though thankfully within sight of each other.

With her lie, it went as she had planned. Lilith had bought the both of them some time.

But at what cost?’

Jaspin remained where he was, arms held above him and chained to the ceiling.
The hall he was trapped in was underground and dark, only a small square of light shone upon him from a tiny hole set in the wall high above. And all was silent.
Jaspin rested now, at last given some reprieve. The others had left him, and for this he was grateful, but it still had not eased his pain entirely.
His knees hurt, kneeling on the hard ground for so long, and he was afraid of what he could not see, the blindfold they had put on him when they begun had been left. And his wings, which he could not at this time withdraw, had been pulled of all of their flight feathers.
He could not withdraw his wings because they were damaged. Only when they were whole again, would he be able to do so.
‘Lilith…’ he wheezed, as a single tear ran down his cheek. ‘I'm sorry…’
He tensed then, hearing movement near him. Groaning he tried to move, but it only hurt him more.
‘Who’s there?’ his voice trembled as he spoke.
Jaspin’s breath caught in his throat as he turned his head from side to side, trying hard to listen to those footsteps, trying to identify where they were.
A hand reached forwards, pulling the blindfold from him.
Jaspin blinked, lifting his head to the hooded figure before him.
He gasped in shock when he recognised the person.

Aski screamed. The red hot iron that had been used to burn him was drawn away.
'I'm begging you' Lilith shouted at the men around her. 'Please stop.'
'This was your idea' Freya said casually, standing by the wall as she watched the ordeal take place. 'I will get this information out of you, or you will die.'
'Then hurt me' Lilith pleaded. 'Aski…he…he can take no more.'
Nearby, Aski was on his knees, hands chained behind his back. Besides from Lilith, Aski and Freya, there were nearly twenty others in the room. The town's watchmen. As cold as ice and completely unmoved by the suffering of the angels. No doubt they saw many unfortunate souls pass through these prisons, and their hearts had grown hard.
'I am hurting you' Freya said to Lilith. 'Are you not suffering now by seeing this?' she turned to Aski again, who knelt with his head hung. His shirt was discarded beside him, and his body scorched and flesh raw where he had been branded over and over.
He tensed suddenly, throwing his head back and hissing through bared teeth as the brand was pressed to him, his skin sizzling.
'Please….' Lilith sobbed. 'Please….'

Later, each was taken to their cells. Separate, but within sight of each other. The guard who stood watch had dozed off, leaning back against the wall with his arms folded and head hung. He drifted in a half sleep, but from time to time would shift from one foot to the other, before falling still again.
Lilith cast a frightful gaze towards him, eyeing the staff that leant against the wall beside him. She looked back at Aski.
'Aski.'
She spoke in a whisper, doing so as quietly as she could.
If the guard heard, then he chose not to react, for he moved not an inch. Aski however, on hearing his name being called, slowly raised his head.
He had been resting on his knees, arms limp beside him and facing away from her.
He turned to her now, meeting her gaze.
'Are you alright?' Lilith whispered.
Aski stared at her a moment, and then he smiled.
'It's alright Lilith' he said to her calmly. 'Very soon it will all be over.'
'What do you mean?'
'You're hair's a mess by the way' Aski said, moving gingerly across his cell and closer to her. 'Look. It's all come loose. I spent ages plating it too.'
'Aski…'
Lilith reached beyond her bars, fingers outstretched towards him, as Aski did the same.
But before their hands could touch, the guard in lightning quick reactions grabbed his staff, whipping it forwards and smacking both of their hands before they could reach each other.
Lilith withdrew sharply, her hand stinging, as Aski in the cell opposite, drew away and back into the shadows.
The guard propped the staff back against the wall beside him, leaning back, closing his eyes and growing still.

Lilith stared miserably across to the cell where Aski was kept, but she could barely see him now.
She retreated into her own cell, leaning back against the wall and holding herself.
I wonder what will happen to us she thought. *If we die, the others will never know.*
She rested her chin on her knees, listening to the rain from outside dripping into the prisons, feeling the moisture around her, pooled on the floor, against her skin.
……I wonder where the others are now……

It was early the next morning that the two of them were taken from their cells and escorted outside.
By this time, word of their presence had spread, and as they were marched forwards side by side, they saw whole hosts of people gathered in the streets to watch them.
'Something's not right' Lilith muttered to Aski as they were moved along. 'What are they going to do with us?'
Beside her Aski didn't answer. His jaw was set, and a vein pulsed in his temple. He was frightened, Lilith could tell.
Her worst fears were realised when they came to the town square.
The watchmen who had been walking around them in a square formation parted then, splitting in the middle so that Aski and Lilith could see what was before then.
The scene that met her caused Lilith's heart to drop to her feet.
Within the clearing in the square, Lilith saw a pyre, and around, crowds of people.
To think that people would actually want to want a cruel spectacle……..oh god…we're going to die here…
'It's alright' Aski said casually from beside her. 'I'm not afraid. Not now that I know my fate, because I know there is another place.'
'How' Lilith sobbed. 'How can you be so sure?'
'Because' Aski answered simply, 'I have faith.'
He stepped forwards boldly then, guided by a watchman and flanked either side by two more, he walked towards the pyre.
'It will be your turn next.'
Lilith listened to Freya's words as she stood nearby, but she didn't register her presence. All of her attention was fixed only on Aski.
This will be the last time I ever see him.
Lilith tilted her head back, breathing deeply, experiencing ever sensation around her, just one last time before the end.
The damp air, and the heavy clouds above them that threatened to fall upon the earth life giving rain, without which nothing could survive. And the sun, though she could feel none of its warmth, it was still beautiful.
Its feels good Lilith thought. *It feels good…*
Now, even her body didn't hurt anymore. She didn't feel the cold chill that had crept into her bones as she slept on the stone floor in her cell, and she didn't fell the old pains from Ena's body, or the new pains passed onto her from Jaspin.
I almost wish he were dead, just so that I may see him again, in the place I am going now.

Her heart no longer hurt with every beat, her back and chest didn't hurt, nothing hurt.
Not anymore.
I was hoping at least to die in my own body, but if Aski says there's an afterlife……then perhaps……
She watched as Aski ascended the steps to the platform, some of the guards remained at the base of the steps, some of them continued to walk with him.
Throughout the square, was hushed silence.
No one uttered a word.
Lilith was grasped by a sudden urge to rush up to him, to take him in her arms and to hold him, just one last time.
She watched as Aski was tied to the pyre with heavy ropes. The watchmen stepped back and moved away.
Aski was elevated above the others, seeing over the heads of the crowd. His whole body was bound, hands tied behind his back.
He caught Lilith's eye then.
He suddenly smiled.
Lilith's breath caught in her throat. She watched as another watchman from the ground approached the base of the pyre with a burning torch.
Her hands began to tremble as she clasped them over her heart, beginning to weep as the torch was lowered, setting the hay and twig between the larger pieces of wood on fire, the flames catching fast and climbing ever higher toward Aski.
'You're too cruel' Lilith sobbed.
Near her, Freya turned, knowing she had been addressed. She looked away again silently, watching the pyre burn.
Aski hunched forward, head bowed. He began to cough violently as the smoke began to billow.
Suddenly he straightened, and the fire began to roar, swiftly turning into a blazing inferno.
Freya straightened, unfolding her arms and tensing. Lilith noticed something was wrong too.
They all saw Aski standing in the fire, the flames licking his body, burning his clothes away, along with the rope that held him. But he did not scream, he did not utter a sound, and as Lilith looked more closely, she saw a look of peace on his face as he tilted his head back, eyes closed.
'Someone get a crossbow!' Freya hollered, casting an arm out to the watchmen around her. 'Kill him!'
Aski fell forwards on the pyre, standing completely naked. Free from his binds he cast out his steely silver wings, unfurling them from his body. They were beautiful. He tore forwards towards Lilith and Freya suddenly, moving as fast as a streak of lightning; he was upon them in no time.
The watchmen pulled Freya back sharply, dragging her behind them to protect her and drawing their weapons.
Lilith drew a slow gasp as Aski, ignoring all of the others, even Freya, descended upon her. Lilith leant back as he loomed over her. Everything seemed to move so slowly. He bent low then, arms wrapping around her waist and lifting her over his shoulder, beating his wings and lifting into the air.

Aski flew, soaring over the town, below them in the square they left chaos behind them as people ran around shouting and watchmen barked orders to one another.
Lilith clutched onto Aski tightly as they flew, clawing in fear at his the skin on his back as she held him, feeling so out of her depth and so dependent on him.
Please hold me tightly.
She had no wings, not in this body. Her hair and clothes whipped violently as they travelled at such speeds. Tears ran down Lilith's cheeks, left over from the fear of seeing Aski die, the shock of having escaped her own death, and the fear of falling to her death.
It was all too much for her.
And then they began to descend.
'Aski what are you doing we have to get away!'
'Wait!' Aski called back to her. 'I've seen something…I sense something….the others are here!'
Others?
They came to land in a small courtyard on the edge of the town. They had nearly escaped, where so close to the plains beyond.
'Why have we stopped?' Lilith asked him as he put her down. 'They are still after us!'
'Don't you feel it?' Aski replied. His tone was harsh, was angry, and for a moment Lilith felt uncertain. 'Don't you feel it?' Aski replied again. 'Listen!'
Lilith hesitated. She froze for a moment, and suddenly sensed something.
She whipped around, eyes wide as she faced the dark interior of the stables beside them.
'Could it be…?' she uttered, tears of shock brimming in her eyes as she stared into the shadows through the open stable door. 'Is it really them?'
Two figures stepped out then, moving away from the darkness, and into the light.
'Reuben!' Lilith cried, seeing the first figure clearly as the other hung back in the doorway, looming in the shadows.
He smiled at her as he approached. Reuben was just as she had remembered him, and despite his brush with death, he looked strong, and despite everything that had happened, he seemed to stand taller than he did before.
Lilith rushed up to him, falling into his embrace and holding him tightly.
'Thank god you're alright! I feared the worst…I thought that I would never see you again.'
Reuben held her back, arms wrapped around her, his hold was firm yet gentle.
'It's not over' he spoke softly to her, resting his cheek upon her head as she buried her face in his chest.
'Where's Jaspin?' Lilith uttered. 'I sensed him.'
Reuben stepped back, turning around.
Lilith looked to the figure that had stayed back. He approached now, and Lilith saw Jaspin standing before her.
'Jaspin…' her face fell then as she saw him clearly. 'Oh my god…your wings…'
'It doesn't matter' Jaspin replied solemnly to her. 'I am glad to see you too, but we must leave now. We haven't much time.'
As he spoke Reuben had moved over to Aski, taking off his robe and offering it to him. Aski took it, using it to cover himself.
'The watchmen won't be far behind us' Aski said. 'We have to get away from here.'

Reuben took two horses from the stables beside them. They wore bridles, but no saddles.
'You will need these' he said, giving one of the horses to Lilith. 'They are fast. Use them to travel as fast as you can, as far away as you can. Direction does not matter. Just go, go and don't look back.'
The other horse he gave to Jaspin.
'What about you?' Lilith asked, as Jaspin mounted the dappled mare.
'They cannot catch us' Reuben said, as Aski joined his side. 'We are too fast for them, too free.' He cast his gold wings out, standing beside Aski's silver ones; the two of them looked magnificent.
'Please stay safe' Lilith begged of them.
'We will do what we can' Aski grinned. 'We will watch over you. Do not worry about us…worry about yourselves.'
And with that, Aski took to the air, followed shortly by Reuben. And before Lilith knew it, the both of them were gone.
So soon after I found you alive Lilith thought for Reuben, *and so soon after I thought I would have to endure the sight of your death* she thought for Aski. *Why are we always splitting up?*
'Hurry' Jaspin said to her, as his horse pranced on the spot, agitated by their presence and becoming a little spooked. 'We have to go.'
Lilith looked up at him as his horses walked by her. His wings, which he could not retract at this time because they were so damaged, hung behind him like skeletal remains. So far had he fallen from grace, once so beautiful and majestic, now……
Lilith turned her head away sharply, trying not to think of it, trying not to imagine the pain he must be going through. Being unable to fly was a terrible thing for an angel. For most of her life Lilith had not flown, but to have learnt how to fly, and to have it taken away from her, existing in a body that was not her own…it was one of the worst things she could imagine.
Lilith mounted her horse quickly, setting off after Jaspin. He waited until she was ready, before kicking his horse into a canter.
Side by side, Jaspin and Lilith tore across the plains, heading as far away from this terrible town as they could.
This was after all, Freya's territory.

Chapter Thirty Two
Into the Wilderness

Reuben and Aski did what they could, but it wasn't long before they returned to Jaspin and Lilith, bringing with news they did not want to hear.
'They are on their way' Aski said. 'There are so many, and their horses are faster than the ones you've got, better and stronger. It won't be long before they find you.'
'We could escape' Lilith said hopefully. 'We could hide. Couldn't we?'
The others looked uncomfortable and avoided her eyes.

‘It’s…a long way from anywhere’ Reuben answered reluctantly. ‘They’ve sent out scouts. It’s only a matter of time before they find us.’

Jaspin and Lilith travelled without pause, and their horses were getting exhausted. But it was that very night, as Reuben and Aski flew back and forth over their heads surveying the land, that the inevitable happened.
‘A scout has found you’ Reuben told them. ‘They are on their way.’
Even as darkness fell, the town’s watchmen did not give up the hunt, and Jaspin and Lilith were chased throughout the night.
It tormented them. Both were exhausted, but regular reports from Reuben and Aski told that despite their efforts, the gap was closing.
As Lilith listened to this, a tear ran down her cheek. She did not even notice it at first, so tired was she; she couldn’t even remember the last time she slept.
I'm so glad Jaspin is alive. But after all this time, I haven’t even been able to really talk to him.
It was early the next morning that Jaspin’s horse ran into a rabbit hole, breaking its leg. Jaspin ended its life humanely, and shortly after Lilith chose to abandon her horse as the poor beast was so exhausted by now that it could barely stand. And so, Jaspin and Lilith travelled on foot.
‘I'm sorry’ Lilith sobbed after a time. ‘I'm sorry things had to be this way.’
‘Lilith’ Jaspin spoke firmly, holding her by the shoulders. ‘You must be strong. You mustn’t give into despair.’
His wings still hung behind him, stripped of all their flight feathers, they looked so scrawny and weak in comparison to Reuben and Aski’s.
Lilith turned back to the cliff before them. A sheer drop.
‘What are we going to do?’
They waited for as long as they could for Aski and Reuben to return to them. Aski had flown one way, while Reuben the other, searching for a way off the cliff and to somewhere that might offer them some safety and shelter.
‘There is a path this way’ Aski said when he returned to them. His body trembled and his skin was beaded with sweat. Reuben had been the same. The two of them had been flying none stop for hours and hours. Reuben had not come back yet.
‘Will we make it in time?’ Jaspin asked him.
Aski turned back behind them, glaring at the dark shapes on the horizon that were drawing steadily closer.
‘Perhaps not’ he answered solemnly. ‘But we must try all the same.’

Jaspin and Lilith ran. But they could not get far. It was less than an hour later when Lilith collapsed.
‘I can’t’ she sobbed, resting on her knees with her palms against the earth. ‘This body is too weak’ she said wheezing. ‘I cannot go any further.’
They had reached a waterfall now, and as Jaspin knelt before her, Aski looked over the both of them. By now, he could see clearly the faces of the men hunting them. There were nearly thirty, and they were closing the net around the angels.

‘We will be dead if we do not move’ Aski mumbled, his voice barely audible.
‘Aski’ Jaspin said turning to him. ‘Take Lilith and go.’
Aski glanced down at him.
‘No!’ Lilith cried. ‘I can’t lose you. There’s already been too much I've lost in my life, too much in my life that I regret. Please don’t let it be you too!’
‘There is no other way’ Jaspin said not looking at her. Instead his attention was fixed upon the horses that rode their way.
‘They are nearly upon us’ Aski said quietly, standing by them with his arms folded. ‘We must make a choice.’
‘Take her’ Jaspin repeated.
‘You are more important than me!’ Lilith begged. ‘Oh please, please don’t let yourself be killed.’
‘Aski cannot carry me’ Jaspin spoke to Lilith calmly, as if soothing a worried child. ‘But you are small. He can carry you to the bottom of this cliff.’
‘But what about you?’
Jaspin glanced back to the wall of men approaching fast. In a few short seconds they would be upon them, and many were drawing the strings of the bows they carried, arrows ready to fire.
‘They're too close’ Aski spoke panicking now. ‘I'm sorry…’
He unfurled his wings and grabbed Lilith swiftly. She screamed as she was lifted, the arrows shot through the air after them, aimed for Aski. But at this angle, they didn’t have much of a chance to hit the vein in his wing, the vein that if cut could not be mended.
Lilith screamed for Jaspin as he was left behind, watching her with a relaxed demeanour, as if he had already accepted the inevitable, as if he was ready and willing to die.
Lilith screamed at the top of her lungs, trying to reach for him, and pawing at Aski’s back as he carried her over his shoulder.
‘NO! JASPIN! WE CAN’T JUST LEAVE HIM!’
Her heart stopped in her chest as she saw Jaspin step forward and over the edge of the waterfall, plummeting down to the river below.
The last thing she saw of him before he hit the water, were what was left of his wings, trailing after of him as he fell.
The world froze for her. Aski’s wings seemed to beat so slowly, and the watchmen on the cliff slowed to a stop, horses moving back and forth on the edge and tossing their heads. The watchmen called and pointed, but they could not get to them, not now. The cliff was sheer and it would take a long time for them to reach the bottom, by which time, the angels would be long gone.
Lilith turned back to Aski, calling to him.
‘Put me down!’ she screeched. ‘Jaspin…he jumped!’
Aski immediately descended, wings tilted he drew closer to the ground.
When he touched down, Lilith instantly pulled away from him, running away and towards the river that ran beside them.
The trees were thick, the roots twisted. She tripped in her haste as she went, the thorns of the bushes tearing as her delicate skin, causing her to bleed.
But she didn’t care. She only cared about Jaspin.

Oh please god let him be alright.
She came to the river bank, skidding to a stop and glancing up and down the river.
The sand at her feet was soft and warm in the sun; the trees in the forest behind grew tall, and despite the water running fast before her, roaring as it went, hitting the rocks within, everything seemed quiet.
Aski caught up to her, coming up from behind. He stopped, watching her a few steps back.
'I can't see him' Lilith mumbled desperately. 'I can't….'
She trailed off, falling to her knees suddenly and bowing her head with hands together. She began to pray.
Aski watched her in silence as she did so. He turned to look towards the right then, sensing it the same time as Lilith did.
Lilith gasped as she stared wide-eyed up river, towards the waterfall. She rose to her feet and made her way forwards, finding Jaspin as he crawled out of the water.
'Jaspin!' she cried, falling before him and grasping his shoulders. 'Thank god! Are you alright?'
He lifted his head up to her, resting on his hands and knees now. His face contorted in grief.
'I'm…' he began. 'I am well.'
'Oh Jaspin…' Lilith began to cry.
'Lilith' Jaspin said then, grabbing her hand as she rested it on his shoulder. 'I'm so sorry!'
Her heart tightened in her chest then as she saw tears beginning to stream down Jaspin's cheeks.
'I'm sorry…' Jaspin said again. 'I'm sorry that I hurt you…I'm sorry I didn't come back when I had the chance…and I'm sorry…you had to see me this way….'
He sat back on his heels, head bowed in grief.
His wings, now soaking wet hung before him, looking thinner than they had before.
'I am nothing…if I cannot fly.'
'You are the black and white angel' Lilith spoke firmly to him. 'You are the most important one left of us, the most powerful…'
'And I still could not defeat her' Jaspin breathed, '*the false one*…Ena would be furious.'
'No' Lilith shook her head. 'She would understand. I feel it in my heart.'
Jaspin raised his head to her.
'You fought her' Aski offered. 'Didn't you?'
'I…' Jaspin faltered. 'Yes.'
'Then you weakened her.' Aski unfolded his arms. 'Ena would be please.' He straightened. 'But we cannot linger here. We've bought some time at least, but they will still pursue us.'
Jaspin hunched forwards, dragging his feet beneath him and hauling himself up. There were cuts and bruises over his body, but nothing was broken, and despite everything, he looked well enough, he looked like he would manage.
'Alright' Jaspin breathed as Lilith clung to his arm. 'Let's go…'

A few hours later, and the three angels were deep within the woods, and Reuben still had not come back yet.
'Where is he?' Lilith worried. 'Why hasn't he returned yet?'

‘He’s probably lost us’ Aski grumbled back as they walked. ‘Don’t worry. He’ll find us eventually.’
‘I just hope he hasn’t been hurt’ Lilith uttered, holding her hands over her heart.
Jaspin glanced to her, but said nothing.
‘What happened?’ Lilith said to him looking up. ‘How did you find him?’
Jaspin slowed to a stop, the others did too.
‘I didn’t’ Jaspin replied. ‘I didn’t find him. He came to me.’
‘What happened?’ Lilith asked again.
‘We should rest’ Jaspin suggested. ‘Just for a moment. We’ve walked far enough now.’
They sat where they were on the forest floor, and Jaspin began.
‘There was this girl’ Jaspin began.

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Ena’s attention then fell on Reuben, whose breath was shallow, and skin paling.
‘I've not much magic left’ Ena breathed. She addressed Reuben now. ‘I could save you. But I have not the magic for both of you.’ She looked over Aski again. ‘Do you want me to save him? I cannot if too much time has passed…but Aski has only just left this life. If I am quick…’
‘Save him’ Reuben whispered; his voice barely audible now. ‘Please……save him.’

Reuben woke some unknown time later. He didn’t know how long the passage of time was that had been; he only knew the agony when he came to.
Reuben cried out, curling up and holding himself.
His breath was shallow, and his body began to tremble.
He lay there, head resting against the cold stone floor, blinking several times to clear his foggy vision.
His body began to shake more violently, as if he were trapped in the freezing cold. He lifted his hand to his face, covering his eyes when his vision failed to clear.
He drew his hand away again, when he heard movement near him.
The bodies of the holy men still lay around him where they had fallen. But there was another figure that was here that had not been so before. A young girl.
Reuben’s eyes were wide as he turned his head slowly towards her.
She approached, standing over him.
‘Are you alright?’
Reuben only stared.
The girl knelt beside him, and Reuben got a better look at her.
She was perhaps only twelve in age, with light skin and blonde hair, plated and hanging before her as she leant forward towards him. She dressed in plain and practical clothes, the kind of which a traveller would wear.
‘Can you stand?’ she asked him. ‘You're the only one left alive here.’

Reuben sobbed, hand going to his face again.
‘Are the others…’ he wheezed, ‘are the others alive?’
‘I saw the group you came here with. All of them left. I think they were all alive. One of them had to be carried…’
‘How….did you survive?’ Reuben whispered. ‘The spell…’
‘I've been living in the bell tower’ the girl explained. ‘Whatever magic happened here, it didn’t reach me.’
Reuben’s eyes slipped out of focus then, as he stared at the ground by him, not speaking again.
‘Come on’ the girl said rising again. ‘Can you stand?’
She grabbed his wrist before waiting for an answer and began to pull him up. She was surprisingly strong for her age. Reuben at first did not respond, and then, after a few seconds, he grasped her arm, holding tightly, pulling against her and rising to his feet again.
He stumbled forwards, falling to a knee and crying out in pain as his body burned him from the inside.
She let go of him as he held himself. Reuben grimaced, baring his teeth in determination, before getting his feet beneath him and slowly rising again, straightening, he stood tall.
‘There’ the girl smiled. ‘That’s better.’
Reuben grimaced again, squeezing his eyes tight shut as the last sliver of pain left his body.
He sighed then, relaxing, shoulders slumped. He turned to the girl then, acknowledging her properly for the first time.
‘Who are you?’
‘My name is Klesa’ she smiled, placing a hand on her heart. ‘What is your name?’
‘I'm Reuben.’
‘So you're an angel?’
‘Yes.’ He bowed his head. ‘Where…where are your parents?’
‘They're…’ Klesa looked away then, avoiding his gaze and biting her lip hard. ‘They’re dead’ she spoke quietly.
‘I'm sorry’ Reuben spoke tentatively. ‘When…did that happen?’
‘Yesterday.’
Reuben lowered his eyes. ‘I'm sorry…I didn’t mean to pry.’
‘Where did your friends go?’ she asked him. ‘Why did they leave you?’
‘I don’t know.’
‘Why don’t we find them together?’ Klesa suggested.
‘Together?’ Reuben hesitated. ‘Don’t you have a home to go to? What about your family?’
‘Everyone I could have called a family are gone now’ Klesa mumbled in reply, looking to her feet and holding her hands behind her back. ‘It’s…just me now.’
‘Was it….the sickness?’
‘Yes’ she said. ‘It’s just me now. Me and my horse.’
‘We can travel together’ Reuben said. ‘If that’s what you want.’
‘It is’ Klesa spoke eagerly, meeting his eyes again and brightening suddenly. ‘It doesn’t matter where you're going. As long as I can survive.’
‘Very well. Then let us go outside.’

They left the temple. Klesa did not seem fazed by the bodies scattered around her, the holy men that Ena had killed with her magic, and for some reason, this bothered Reuben.
'So which direction are we going?' Klesa asked happily.
'I don't know.' They slowed to a stop. 'I can't feel her' Reuben said, gazing all about and slowly turning on the spot as he took in the vast world around them. 'She must not want to be found. Perhaps she is hiding. But I can feel…' he looked the other way. 'Jaspin' he finished. 'Your signal is strongest.'
'Why is that?' Klesa spoke in a sing song voice, filled with a curious interest.
'He is the strongest of our kind' Reuben mumbled in answer. 'His beacon burns the strongest……he is near.'
'Is that where we're going?' Klesa asked. 'Are we going to find them?'
'Yes' Reuben answered.
'I have a horse' Klesa said to him.
They went to the stables.
'His name is Prince' Klesa said, rubbing the horse's forehead. A palomino stallion, he was a beautiful and muscular horse. 'My family have had him since before I was born. He is all I have left of my old life now.'

They travelled together with Reuben leading the way, his golden wings shining in the sunlight, he watched over Klesa as she rode across the open plains on her stallion Prince.
Days later, and they reached a temple in the mountains.
'Have you been here before?' Klesa asked Reuben as they stopped to rest.
He looked up. The two had grown close to one another in the short time they had been together, and now shared a bond. 'Yes' Reuben answered. 'This is the home of the false earth maiden, the one known as Freya.'
'And we're here to rescue the black and white angel called Jaspin?'
'Yes' Reuben said again. 'He is in danger.'
He rose to his feet, looking away.
'Stay here' he said to Klesa. 'I'll be back soon. Don't follow me. It's too dangerous for you.'
He left her there, hidden in the rocks with a little food he had stolen from a nearby village. She waited obediently, and Reuben went forwards, venturing tentatively into the holy temple, searching for Jaspin.
He found him, in a dark hall trapped underground, with only a small square of light shining on him from above.
Jaspin was kneeling and chained. His wings, which he could not at this time withdraw as they were damaged, had been pulled of all of their flight feathers.
Jaspin spoke then, and Reuben heard Lilith's name.
He moved closer, and Jaspin tensed.
'Who's there?' Jaspin's voice trembled as he spoke.
Reuben reached forwards, pulling the blindfold from him.
Jaspin blinked, lifting his head to Reuben, gasping in shock as he recognised him.
'…Reuben?'
Reuben raised his hands, drawing his hood slowly back.
'Hello Jaspin' he grumbled. 'My old friend.'

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‘We found you shortly after that’ Jaspin finished. ‘The three of us went to the town to find you.’
‘But the girl’ Lilith said. ‘Klesa. Where is she?’
‘Perhaps Reuben’s gone back for her?’ Aski suggested.
‘Yes’ Jaspin nodded. ‘Those were my thoughts also.’
‘But…’ Lilith grasped the fallen leaves on the earth beside her. ‘Surely that was not the right thing to do. Not now, not when we are still being hunted.’
‘The girl is completely alone’ Jaspin explained simply. ‘Without Reuben, she would not survive on her own. It’s dangerous for a girl so young to be alone. He feared for her when we left her behind, I could see it in his heart. He thought about her often.’
‘He cares deeply for this girl then?’ Lilith mumbled glancing up.
‘Yes’ Jaspin bowed his head. ‘They’ve only known each other for a short time, but disaster brings people together. Do you remember’ he said, ‘ages ago, Reuben spoke of his past. After he was cast down from heaven, he was reborn to a human mother whom he lost when he was young. He grew up in an orphanage after that.’
‘Yes’ Lilith mumbled. ‘I remember him saying something like that.’
‘As do I’ Aski grumbled.
‘He told me’ Jaspin went on. ‘One of the children he became close to was a young girl with blonde hair. He loved her like a sister…but in the end she succumbed to the sickness, along with all the other children. Only Reuben survived.’
‘How?’ Lilith asked. ‘How do some people survive while others die?’
She thought then of the people in her life she had known that had died because of the sickness. First there was her sister, Claret? Was that her name? She couldn’t remember. Then there was her husband, Walter, and the boy he cared for. Had he died? She couldn’t even remember… Where there others? Had Martin the huntsman died, the man who used to teach Ben?
Lilith let out a deep sigh, rubbing her forehead with a palm as a sudden wave of misery closed in around her.
What am I doing with my life?
‘We don’t know’ Jaspin said in response to her question. ‘No one really knows what the sickness is or how it works. It could come from the air, the food we eat, the water we drink…from the very earth itself…we don’t know, we’ve no idea…and because of this it makes the sickness all the more dangerous. None of us are safe.’
‘And angels can get is too?’ Lilith asked tentatively, reluctant to hear the answer.
‘Yes’ Jaspin answered glumly. ‘Even angels succumb to it’
‘And you?’ Lilith asked, raising her head. ‘Could you get it too?’

‘My body is stronger. My resistance to the sickness is stronger than yours of that of the other angels. But I am not immune. It would take me longer to get infected by it, and even longer to die from it…but…in the end…I would eventually die from it.’
Lilith turned away from him, burying her face in her arms to hide her grief.
‘Come on’ Aski spoke up, rising to his feet. ‘We should get moving. It would be dangerous to stay for too long here.’

The three of them made their way onwards, heading in no particular direction, only away from the cliff behind them, away from the town as far as they could go.
Jaspin and Reuben were strong, but in Ena’s body, Lilith could not keep up with them. Her long pale green hair had come loose from the bun Aski had tied it in, the plate scruffy and dishevelled. And her skin, her face and over her body was still terribly bruised.
‘You have not fared well’ Jaspin had said to her at one point.
‘I'm still doing better than you’ Lilith had smiled weakly, indicating Jaspin’s broken wings that trailed after him as they went.
Jaspin had smiled in return.
Now, Lilith was dropping behind the others as they traversed the thick undergrowth. None of them had eaten or slept longer than they could clearly remember, and it was beginning to show, even more so for Lilith.
She stumbled, tripping over a gnarled root that twisted up from the earth and cutting her knee. Lilith grimaced in pain as the new injury stung her, already feeling yet another bruise forming.
Jaspin came back for her.
‘Are you alright?’
‘I’m…’ she shuddered, looking away and fighting back tears. ‘I don’t want to cause you any trouble.’
‘Don’t be foolish.’ He turned around then, kneeling with his back to her. ‘Hold onto my back. ‘I’ll carry you.’
‘I can’t’ Lilith said to him. ‘I don’t want to be a burden.
‘You are more of a burden making me worry for you’ Jaspin said back to her. ‘Now come on. We’ll move faster this way.’
Lilith reluctantly crawled forwards, holding him from behind and hanging onto his shoulders.
Jaspin rose.
‘There’ he said. ‘You weigh almost nothing; now give me your legs.’
He held her with his arms hooked behind the knees as he made his way forwards, towards Aski who had been waiting for them.
Lilith held onto him, feeling Jaspin’s scrawny wings either side of her as they made their way onwards and further into the wilderness.
She let out a slow breath, resting with her cheek against his back.
She closed her eyes.

Chapter Thirty Three
A Painful Reminder of Things to Come

Lilith didn't realise she had fallen asleep until she felt a touch to her forehead.
She opened her eyes to see Jaspin kneeling over her. He was smiling as she gazed back at him, brushing her hair back.
'Hey' he spoke warmly to her. 'Did you rest well?'
She stared back at him, lying back against the trunk of a tree. They had not left the woods yet. Near them she could hear the gentle song of a river that ran by. She blinked in the sun, as the leaves in the canopy above waved gently back and forth in the light breeze, blinking the light in her eyes.
'Jaspin…' Lilith rasped. Her stomach grumbled, and her throat felt as if it were filled with sand. 'I'm thirsty.'
Jaspin's smile widened as he caressed her cheek. He leant forward, kissing her tenderly on the forehead. Lilith closed her eyes as he did so, drawing back again, she looked at him again.
'Reuben said the watchmen have given up' Jaspin said quietly. 'They've lost us. We're safe.'
'Reuben?' Lilith's mind worked slowly. It took her several seconds to understand what Jaspin had said to her. 'Reuben is safe?'
'He's here' Jaspin indicated behind him. 'And he's brought us food.'
Lilith's attention slid past Jaspin, and to the small group behind him.
In the clearing, there they were. Aski was sitting on the ground with his legs crossed, eating and watching Reuben with a young girl who must have been Klesa. Reuben and Klesa sat facing each other. They seemed to be playing some kind of game, a memory game, where one person had to touch the other persons fingers in a pattern, then have it done back to them, with the pattern extended. The person who failed to remember the pattern correctly would lose, and the game would begin over.
The three of them looked up as Lilith rose to her feet, walking over to them.
'Lilith.' Reuben's expression broke into a wide grin. 'You're alright. I'm so glad.'
She knelt before him, wrapping her arms around him in a firm embrace.
'Thank god' she whispered into his ear. 'Thank god you're safe……I was so worried.'
She let go of him then, turning around to see the young girl.
'This is Klesa' Reuben introduced as the young girl smiled at her. 'She is the one who found me after…' he trailed off.
'I know' Lilith said. 'Jaspin told Aski and I what happened to you.' Her expression contorted in grief then. 'I'm sorry we left you.'
'You had no choice' Reuben shook his head. 'It doesn't matter anyway. We are all together, and Ena is safe…wherever she is.'
Lilith bowed her head to acknowledge this, turning then to Klesa.
'Hello' she said to the young girl. 'It's nice to meet you. My name is Lilith.'
'I'm Klesa' the blonde girl beamed back to her. 'And this is my friend' she said stroking the palomino stallion that lay down right behind her. 'His name is Prince.'
She loves her horse Lilith smiled kindly, heart warming in her chest. *Just like Ena.*
'He's a beautiful horse' Lilith said to her. 'Tell me more about him.'

‘Actually’ Klesa began shyly. ‘I’d like to hear more about you. Aski had already told me his story. I’d like to hear yours. That’s not your own body, is it?’

‘This is so much fun!’ Klesa sang happily as she swung on the tree branch. ‘It’s like a holiday.’
The group walked at a gentle pace now, their brisk march had now become a lazy wander as they trailed through the woods. As they went, Klesa and Reuben played together. Lilith tilted her head back to the branches above her, smiling as the leaves rained down upon their heads. She watched as Klesa crawled above them, jumping from one branch to the next. Either side of Lilith, Jaspin and Aski watched also, smiling as she did.
Reuben climbed further up the tree, grasping the branches around him and hauling himself up.
‘I'm coming to get you’ he sang to Klesa, who panicked and tried to get away.
She squealed in delight as he drew closer to her, grabbing her as she made her escape and tickling her until she couldn’t breathe.
‘It’s so wonderful to know things are better again’ Lilith sighed as she watched them. ‘I feel…happy. It almost feels like we’re a family…with Klesa around. She is such a sweet young girl.’
‘She is’ Jaspin nodded beside her.
He reached for her, wrapping am arm around her shoulders and pulling her close.
‘Lilith’ he breathed. ‘I hope I never have to leave your side.’
Lilith glanced up at him. She smiled a genuine smile then. For the first time in years she felt truly happy, after living through the storm, they had all come out together and alive in the end.
‘I hope these days last forever’ she sighed to him. ‘I hope things never change.’
Aski watched them both with joy, before glancing back to Reuben and Klesa in the tree above them.
‘We have better make the most of today then’ Aski mumbled to himself, ‘for who knows when things will change.’

It was the very next morning, when events took a turn for the worst.
Lilith was woken by the sound of sobbing. She opened her eyes wide, heart jolting in her chest as she recognised the sound.
She sat bolt upright, whipping around towards the source, her heart sinking further in her chest at what she saw.
A short distance from her, was Reuben. He was kneeling with his back to her, cradling Klesa in his arms and rocking back and forth, sitting back on his heels.
His head was bowed, and as he held Klesa, Lilith saw that her body was limp.
Lilith instinctively knew that she was dead.
‘…Reuben?’
He lifted his head, glancing back to her.

Lilith saw the fear in his bloodshot eyes, the sadness; the despair.
He shook his head at Lilith. He opened his mouth and tried to speak, but no words came out.
Reuben turned away from her, gazing back down to Klesa he held. He held her head tenderly, putting his lips to her cheek, shoulders wracked with sobs.
'It isn't fair' he whimpered. 'It isn't fair…'
The others were beginning to wake now.
Aski sat up, staring at Reuben in shock, and beside him, Jaspin's face was set in stone.
Lilith came around Reuben, coming to kneel before him; she got a better look at Klesa's face. Her face was sickly pale, her skin flaking away and black veins thick and gruesome, clearly visible on her neck, spreading beneath her cracked skin as far as her cheeks.
Lilith opened her mouth. 'The sickness' she breathed. 'It has come.'
Reuben raised his head, looking away. Lilith followed his gaze a short distance away, staring in disbelief.
Klesa's beloved horse Prince was dead.
'It kills the creatures too?' Lilith whispered. 'But…but how…?'

The angels buried Klesa as soon as they could, kneeling on the forest floor and digging with their hands. Lilith helped too, it was arduous work, and took a long time. When they were finished, the graves were left unmarked. Klesa was buried, her horse Prince alongside.
It was what she would have wanted.
'What happens now?' Lilith mumbled unhappily as the three that remained, stood before the graves. 'Where do we go?'
'We go back' Jaspin grumbled, 'and find the false one…and kill her…'
Lilith's head snapped towards him. 'After what happened?' she unfolded her arms, straightening. 'How could you say such a thing?'
'She needs to be killed' Jaspin said rounding on her. 'I've weakened her. But with every passing day her powers grow. We must attack and kill her before she gets too strong again. If we all go…'
'It's too dangerous' Lilith shook her head. 'You'll die.'
Jaspin grabbed her by the shoulders, shaking her roughly. For a moment Lilith was frightened. He had never handled her in such a way.
'Don't you understand?!' she shouted at her. 'We are all going to die! At least make you're sacrifice mean something.'
He was shoved back suddenly, by Aski who came to her aid.
'Don't touch her' he barked.
'Is that where you stand?' Jaspin asked him, backing off. 'You don't think we should go after the false one? With all of us we could kill her. Now is the time to do it before she gains the strength.'
'We've lost too much' Aski told him flatly, casting a glance towards Reuben who ignored all of them, standing with his back to them, still facing the graves and in a world of his own. 'I say we return to Ena.'
'Then you are a fool.'

Aski's eyes flashed. 'You cannot fight anyone in your state.'
'I would rather die trying!'
Aski punched him then. Lilith's hand went to her mouth in shock as Jaspin stumbled back, holding his nose.
Jaspin lowered his hand, glaring at Aski, blood running down his face.
He started forwards.
'Jaspin no!'
But Jaspin ignored her, shoving past her as she made to try and stop him, he lunged for Aski.
'JASPIN!' Lilith screeched.
The two angels tore at each other, cutting and burning one another's flesh as magic sparked all around them. Aski brought forth his wings, increasing his power as he did so.
They tore up the ground as they fought.
'REUBEN!' Lilith cried, running over to him and shaking him. 'Reuben stop them please!'
Reuben snapped out of his trance, breaking his attention from the grave before him and turning towards Lilith, eyes still red and teary.
'Stop them!' Lilith shook him desperately. '*PLEASE!'*
Reuben stared a little longer, as if struggling to understand what she was saying to him.
And then he acted.
Reuben moved forwards swiftly, forcing himself between the two, and using his magic to push them apart.
When the two were broken free, Reuben held onto Aski, arms wrapped around him in a tight embrace, holding him back as Lilith ran to stand before Jaspin, stopping him from attacking again.
'Please' Lilith begged him, pushing him back with both hands splayed on his chest. 'Please…no more…'
Jaspin's legs trembled violently, and he fell to a knee, gasping heavily, blood running from his temple.
Lilith glanced back towards Reuben, who still held onto Aski.
Aski's shoulder rose and fell sharply as he breathed. He gritted his teeth then, and his shining silver wings receded into his back.
Reuben released him, stepping away.
Jaspin rose to his feet, the remains of his skeletal wings still hanging behind him. He could not withdraw them, until they had healed. Lilith watched him closely, staring at his wings. He had cut them as they had fought. Blood dripped to the leafy ground from several places, running alone the bone and down his back.
'Enough of this' Reuben spoke in a deadpan voice, head bowed. 'We are brothers. We should not fight each other….we are…' his body trembled as he began to cry again, '…the only ones left…'
Aski hugged him then, holding him in comfort.
Jaspin rose to his feet, looking on in silence.
'I…' Reuben began, turning away from Aski and gathering himself. 'I know where we might go.'
'Where?' Lilith mumbled unhappily.

‘There is a place near here’ Reuben droned, ‘a place that I know of. There is……a family…I know them…I spent many years under their roof. It’s…just them’ he finished. ‘They live far away from anywhere else.’ He turned his head away then, shuddering. ‘Please…’ he whispered. ‘Let’s just go. I want to get away from here. I have to….I can’t…’
Lilith moved away from Jaspin and towards Reuben, holding him either side of his face.
‘Alright’ Lilith whispered to him, turning his face towards hers. ‘We’ll go there. Let’s go now.’

There were four of them left now, and they walked in complete silence, doing so for several days before they reached their destination.
It was a collection of small buildings, with a slightly larger building in the centre, set against the rocky cliff of the mountain behind, and around, were little paddocks of sheep and goats and pigs, several vegetable patches and a pond.
‘Is this the place?’ Lilith asked Reuben.
Reuben looked to her, before looking back towards the buildings.
‘Yes’ he said quietly. ‘After I left the orphanage…I lived here for many years…before moving on.’
The front door to the larger building in the centre opened then, and an older woman came out.
‘Reuben?’
‘Ana’ Reuben responded, lifting his head.
She ran to him, running into his arms.
‘It’s been years!’ the woman said, she was middle aged, slender and looking a little frail. ‘I thought that I might never see you again.’
Behind her, several other figures trailed out of the house, her husband, her mother, and her three children, two young boys and a mature young woman.
‘Reuben’ the woman said, leaning back so that she could look into his face. ‘How have you been?’
Behind Reuben, Aski, Jaspin and Lilith watched silently.
‘We need a place to stay’ Reuben grumbled. ‘Can you help us?’

PART 6
3 months later

Chapter Thirty Four
The Call

It was a glorious summer day, the sky was clear and the sun shone bright and warm. Birds sang, sheep bleated, and the breeze whistle in the long grasses that grew beyond the farm.

Jaspin unfurled his wings, one jet black like the darkest pits of hell, one such a pure and holy white, it glowed in the sunlight so bright, you could not look at it for more than a few seconds.
He beat his wings, fully feathered and pristine. The last three months of rest had allowed him to heal, and he felt stronger now that he had in a long time.
Jaspin held onto the gnarled root that twisted up from the earth, beating his wings harder and harder to create a strong wind, before shooting off into the air with all speed, putting even the fastest creature that flew to shame.
On the ground, Lilith watched with a smile, hand shielding her eyes from the blaring sun.
'It's good to see Jaspin himself again' she said. 'Isn't it.'
'Yeah' Reuben said beside her. 'It is.'
Lilith bowed her head, lowering her hand and feeling a stir of envy within her. She had not flown in so long, still trapped in Ena's frail body. The bruises had long since gone, but the old aches had remained. The painful heart, the aching bones. But she had kept silent about it, not wanting to worry the others, especially since they could not help her. It's just the way she was, the way Ena was.
'Where is Aski?' Lilith voice.
'Do you have to ask?' Reuben smirked pointing. 'He's over there.'
As they looked, the two of them saw Aski a distance away. He was with the eldest daughter, lying back on the tall grass with her on top of him. As they kissed, he pushed her back, resting on top of her now. They broke apart then, walking hand in hand away and to somewhere more private.
The two of them headed towards the mountain on the doorstep of their home, heading towards the maze of rocks and disappearing from view.
Lilith smirked at this.
'I'm happy for him' she said. 'At least some good has come from this.'
'They can't keep their hands off one another' Reuben shook his head in amusement. 'Like young lovers. He is as doey eyed as her.'
'I think it's sweet.'
'Have you ever been in love?' Reuben asked turning to her.
'Once…twice…' Lilith mumbled. 'A very long time ago.'
Reuben watched her closely; he seemed to be considering whether or not to question her further, but in the end decided against it. Closing his mouth, he looked away.
And then a voice from the home called out their names.
Lilith and Reuben looked around.
It was Ana, the head of the house and the one who made all the rules. She was the oil in the machine that made the cogs run smoothly. She would give orders, care for the farm and her family and her home.
There were six members that lived within the household. There was Ana, her mother, Sylvia, her husband, Argus, and her three children. The eldest, her daughter Vera, and her two young boys, Tom and Simon.
Ana was leaning out of the front door of the home, waving at them to come.
'What is it?' Reuben asked Ana, as he and Lilith approached her.
'Come inside' Ana said, gleaming at them happily. 'I need your help.'

Moments later, Reuben and Lilith were helping out in the kitchen.
There was always work to be done, and there was hardly a moment's rest within the day.
'I need your help making cherry cakes' Ana had said. 'Do you think you could be of assistance to me?'
And so Reuben and Lilith bustled about the kitchen, obeying Ana's every beck and call.
'Careful' Ana warned as they cooked. 'You don't want them to burn.'
When the cakes were baked, they were shared out within the kitchen amongst the members of Ana's family that were there. There was Sylvia, Angus and the two naughty children, Tom and Simon, who had drifted downstairs to the kitchen from their room, drawn by the sweet scent of fresh cakes.
'Careful' Ana said to her boys as they leant forwards with hungry eye, staring at the tray she held in her gloved hands. 'They're very hot.'
Afterwards Lilith sat with Angus at the kitchen table, speaking to him in a foreign language, one she had learnt when she was a child, and one that Angus thought he had almost completely forgotten.
They each spoke of their pasts, and the amazing things they had seen and encountered in their lives. Lilith was pleased she was still able to remember the old language, and Angus found her very interesting.
Reuben couldn't understand a single thing either of them said, and heard them only as background noise, as he went about tidying the kitchen. He still wore the white apron and cloth to cover his hair he had worn when cooking the cherry cakes. He washed the dished mechanically now, putting them away tidily where they belonged.
It wasn't long before the young boys began to bother him.
'Hey Reuben! Hey Reuben! Hey Reuben! Hey Reuben!'
The muscle around Reuben's eye twitched in annoyance and he gritted his teeth, turning and glancing down to the boys with a forced smile.
'What do you want?' he asked slowly and patiently.
'We want to see your wings' the boys spoke in unison.
'Yeah' Tom gleamed. 'They are so pretty, gold like the sun.'
'I wish I had wings to fly' Simon said forlorn. 'Mine would be blue and black. That would be incredible.'
'It sure would' Reuben sighed. 'But…being an angel is not necessarily a good thing.'
'Why not?'
Reuben smiled. 'You wouldn't…' he sighed. 'Would you like to see my wings?' he offered.
'Oh yeah!'
'Yes please!'
'Reuben' Ana spoke sternly, straightening up and giving him a stern expression. 'You will do that outside. There's not enough room to release your wings inside.'
'Yes Ana.'
Reuben untied his apron, pulling the cloth that covered his hair. He drifted outside, the children trailing after him.
'Hurry up' Tom demanded. 'Let us see them.'
'You've seen them many times before' Reuben said turning to them, standing with a hand on his hip. 'Why are you so eager?'

‘It will never be boring to see them’ Simon grinned. ‘Now hurry.’
Reuben sighed; shoulders slumped, giving into their demands. He could never deny Ana’s children.
He straightened then, and released his wings. The boys draw a deep breath, both in awe of his magnificence.
‘Wow’ Tom sighed, eyes shimmering. ‘Incredible.’
‘Can I touch them?’
‘Of course Simon’ Reuben answered.
He curled his wings around the boys, and they were surrounded, wrapped on either side by the golden feathers, the three of them in their own world now.
Simon reached forwards, fingers splayed as he ran his hand along his wing, stroking the fight feathers.
He grasped suddenly, pulling out a handful of feathers from his wing. Reuben flinched in pain, feeling a flicker of anger within him.
‘You mustn’t do that’ Reuben spoke patiently to the boy. ‘You’re hurting me.’
‘I'm sorry’ Simon uttered, taking a step away. ‘You're feathers are so beautiful…I just want some for myself. I know you won’t stay here with us forever like I want, so I want something to remind me that you were here.’
‘In that case keep them then’ Reuben smiled, kneeling before the boys. ‘Keep them, treasure them, for the four of us…’ he sighed. ‘We are some of the last of our kind left in this worlds…’

Aski brushed Sylvia’s cheek tenderly, leaning back against the rock as she sat on his lap. They were deep within the mountain now, hidden from the rest of the world. It would be near enough impossible for them to be found by any other soul.
‘Aski’ Vera breathed. ‘I love you.’
Aski lifted his light blue eyes to her, drawing a slow breath as she ran her fingers through his long black hair.
‘Vera. I'm so glad I found you. For the longest time…I thought that I would never find love again.’
She smiled, leaning forward. Aski tiled head as he kissed her. Her lips were so tender, her touch so gentle.
He raised his hands that had been resting beside him, reaching up to hold her by the waist.
He looked into her face then as she leant back from him.
She was so beautiful, so young and pretty, with corn coloured hair, bright and shining eyes, with skin so perfect.
‘I love you’ Aski said to her. ‘I love you.’
Her hands moved down his body, unbuttoning his shirt.
‘Wait’ Aski said to her, putting his hand upon hers gently. ‘I just…want to look at your face a little longer.’
‘What is wrong?’ she asked him.
‘I fear…’ he breathed. ‘I fear. I know this good life has to change. I know the earth maiden will summon all of us, will command me to leave your side. There is a task that must be done, and I…I must be the one to do it, myself and the others.’

‘Why?’ Vera asked him, expression dampening. ‘Why do you have to go?’
‘I'm sorry Vera. But it must be this way. You know. I told you this, very early on, as soon as it became important.’
‘I do know’ she sighed. ‘But it will not make losing you any easier.’
‘I know.’ He smiled to her sadly. ‘I will never forget you. You are always on my mind, even now.’ Aski blinked slowly at her. ‘I may die here today’ he said, ‘or tomorrow, or the day after that. It is a dangerous path I walk with my sibling angels, but it’s a task that must be done.’
‘Then let us make the most of this brief moment we have together’ she whispered, leaning towards him again, lips hovering over his. ‘Let us never forget each other…no matter what happens.’
She reached down to him, running her hand to his belt and unbuckling.
Aski sighed, leaning his head back, allowing his body to relax.
His breathing was slow as he experienced everything.
Vera lifted her body up, before lowering it again, doing so slowly.
Aski moaned, holding onto Vera as she began to move.
Vera held him around the neck, kissing him again as Aski tightened his embrace around her.
He dug his nails into her back then, contorting his body. His steely silver wings erupted from his back then, unfurling outwards and around them.
Vera arched her back, leaning back from Aski, still holding onto him and moaning. She slumped forwards then, her breathing fast now. Aski lifted his head up at her, brushing her cheek with the back of his hand, before kissing her again.
‘I wish’ Vera whispered in his ear as they held each other, ‘I wish…you didn’t have to leave. I wish things were different…’

Jaspin stood upon the highest peak of the mountain, looking down at the world all around him, his heart overflowing with joy at experiencing the freedom at last after having been robbed of it, for so long.
‘What a vast world this is in which we live in’ he spoke to the clouds. ‘I could fly forever, and never see the other side.’
He stood facing into the wind, his wings unfurled, one pure black, the other pure white, glowing in the hazy sun that fought through the clouds.
Jaspin closed his eyes, tilting his head back and opening his arms, his wings stretched out wide as the wind whipped his clothes, feathers and hair.
‘How good it feels to be myself again’ he said.
He opened his eyes, looking down now.
‘I only wish Lilith was able to share this experience with me…’
Lilith……
He leapt off the cliff, soaring through the air and descending, as he drew closer to the ground.
The clouds swallowed him, enveloping him in a white world for the longest time, until he dropped low enough to be free from them, drawing closer to the earth below.

Reuben had managed to lose the interest of the young boys long enough to get away. No doubt they would come back to bother him again, as they did with all the angels, who never seemed to lose their fascination for them. He wandered between the smaller buildings around the main house, looking for something to do. No doubt there was a job waiting for him, there always was, and so he went looking, in order to keep him occupied, and to help Ana, who had been so kind to all of them in giving them a safe place to stay. A home. For as long as they needed it.
But something caused him to stop suddenly.
Reuben looked to the building beside him, a small barn built of brick and painted white.
He reached towards it, touching the wall and the gruesome substance upon it, black in colour, and sticky like tar.
It clung to his fingers as he drew his hand back, and he looked down at it closely.
'……what is this…?'

Lilith had left the home to be outside. She had spoken with Argus for quite some time, brushing up on her old language, the tongue she had thought she had forgotten. For a time, she thought that it would never come back to her, but it had. Lilith smiled.
She lay back on the grass outside now, feeling the warm touch of the sun upon her face, the cool and pleasant breeze around her.
'It feels good' Lilith sighed. 'It feels like home.'
A shadow fell across her then, and she opened her eyes, giving a slight gasp of surprise.
Jaspin leant over her, smiling.
'Jaspin' she breathed. 'You gave me a start.'
'I didn't mean to.'
He knelt beside her, leaning over her and resting his forehead against hers. He caressed her face tenderly, as Lilith did the same in return.
'I want to see you happy' Jaspin said to her. 'I only want…to see you smile.'
'I am happy' Lilith responded.
'I know you say that' Jaspin told her, 'but…'
He smiled again, leaning away from her.
'Come' he said, picking her up in his arms. 'Come fly with me.'
His wings unfurled from his back in a flurry, the strong wind swirling around them, whipping at their clothes.
'Jaspin what are you…?'
'I want to show you' Jaspin said to her, holding her close, doing ever so tenderly. 'The view from the top of the mountain…is beautiful…'
He leapt into the air, holding Lilith tightly. Lilith gasped as the ground dropped from below them, looking up suddenly as they headed towards the clouds.
And then she laughed, tilting her head back, holding Jaspin around the neck.
'It feels so good!' she called to him over the wind, and Jaspin smiled.
'It gets better!' he hollered. 'Watch!'

They soared over the farm, seeing the vast expanse of land before them, before heading to the mountains.
Lilith tensed slightly as they drew close to one of the cliffs; the rocky surface was so near to them, that it clipped Jaspin's flight feathers as they went by.
They glided around the outside of the mountain, before Jaspin tilted his wings, changing direction, and heading into its very heart.
As they went, Lilith saw little mountain goats below them, a wild breed that lived here, a miniature animal with shaggy coats and white horns. She watched them as they flew overhead, seeing the modest group with several babies.
'I never knew they lived here!' Lilith said. 'I've never seen them before!'
'They don't come down from the mountains!' Jaspin said. 'They're shy.'
As they explored the mountains, they saw many wonderful things. A basin cut out of the rock, within which was a shallow pool, crystal clear and still like glass, with a single rotten tree on one end.
And further on, a pack of wolves, their grey coats blending with the rock.
At last, they climbed higher, and Jaspin bent his wings, slowing as they descended.
Lilith's feet touched down gently on the cliff edge, and he let go of her.
She turned to the drop before her, as Jaspin curled his wings around. The wind was strong here, whipping back her green hair, tied neatly in a bun behind her head where it was out of the way.
'You're right' she said to him, gazing at the setting sun in awe. 'The world is beautiful from up here.'
'Lilith' Jaspin spoke to her, his tone serious. 'I know you feel incomplete without your wings, I know you try to keep it from your mind, to keep a brave face…but I see that you suffer.'
She turned to him, arms hanging by her side.
'As long as I am with you' she told him, 'I will never be incomplete, and in any case…' she bowed her head then, hands placed over her heart. 'Ena will not forget about me. Of this I am sure. She must want her own body back...no matter how broken it is.'
'Does it still pain you?' Jaspin asked tentatively.
'Yes' Lilith said straightening. 'But they are old pains. I am getting use to them now…they are not so bad.'
At that exact moment, both Lilith and Jaspin experienced it.
They tensed, staring at each other in shock.
Jaspin turned, looking over his shoulder in the direction from which he sensed it.
'…It's her' he hissed. 'She is calling us.'

At the base of the mountain, hidden deep within the maze of rocks, Aski sat bolt upright. He had been lying on his side beside Vera, holding her to him, when he sensed it.
'…She is summoning us…'
He shook Vera awake, speaking to her. Vera listened to him silently, before bursting into tears and hugging him.
He rose and left her then, leaving the mountains and the farm behind, never to see her again.

Reuben stood in the entranceway of the home, his expression dampened.

He spoke to Ana, who bowed her head in understanding.
'Please be safe' she said to him. 'Please take care of yourself. Don't die.'
They embraced each other, before Reuben made a swift departure, soaring through the open sky in the direction where *she* was, in answer to the call. He followed behind Jaspin who carried Lilith, and Aski who had flown before him.
The four headed as fast as they could in the same direction, towards the battlefield, and to war.

Chapter Thirty Five
The Beginning of the End

They came to land in a strange place indeed. Jaspin put Lilith down, and she immediately began to feel afraid.
All around them were soldiers, armed and burly men, giving them both frightening glares.
'It's alright' Jaspin whispered to her, placing his hand upon her shoulder. 'They won't harm us.'
'How do you know?'
'Because these are Ena's men, the men she spent the time away from us gathering. The army. That is what she was doing all this time.' He gave her a gentle smile. 'They won't hurt us' he spoke with surety to her, 'and if they did…I would kill them all.'
She smiled at him in return. 'That is very kind of you.'
'Come' Jaspin said abruptly to her. 'She is waiting.'
He took her by the hand, marching through the throng of people. Despite the fact that Jaspin had amongst the angels been the first to leave to answer the call, he was the last to arrive, having slowed with the effort of carrying Lilith. Reuben and Aski had gotten here before them, but they were nowhere to be seen at this time.
'There must be thousands' Lilith uttered, gazing about her in awe at the grubby faces around her. Travellers and mercenaries and veterans, many bearing black marks upon their faces, crosses that looked as if they had been painted on.
They saw a large red tent up ahead, but before they drew close to it, there emerged a figure from within, followed by a blue winged angel.
On sight of her, Lilith instantly felt a wave of love and affection towards her, and she knew Jaspin was feeling the same.
'…Ena?'
'Lilith!' Ena cried, striding towards her with her arms open, in *her* body, in Lilith's body. 'How wonderful it is to see you again!'
She giggled, and embraced Lilith tightly, as Gael came up behind her.
Ena continued to hold Lilith, as Jaspin and Gael acknowledged one another.
'It's good to see you alive' Gael smiled.
'As it is you' Jaspin bowed his head.
Ena let go of Lilith, stepping back.

Lilith had switched places. She now stood before Gael, not Jaspin, and she realised as she looked at her hands and touched her white hair, that she was herself again.
'I'm in my own body?!'
'A promise is a promise' Ena said to her. 'What's yours is yours.' She tilted her head, hand going to the bun and pulling the band free so that her long pale green hair fell freely down her back. 'Oh' she breathed. 'It is good to be myself again' she sighed.
Lilith looked to Jaspin then, eyes wide. Her wings unfurled from her back quickly, Gael stepping away as this happened.
'Jaspin' Lilith said to him eagerly. 'Please, let us fly together, like we used to!'
He bowed his head to her, grinning as he revealed his black and white wings.
'Yes' he replied. 'Let us do that.'

The pair took flight, soaring over the heads of the army below them, travelling fast until they left them altogether, gliding over the open plains and the world beyond.
Lilith cried out in joy as she went. It felt so good, so liberating to be free after all this time being grounded, after feeling the pain of losing her wings for so long.
She flipped over, turning in the air and flying on her back, reaching her arms up to Jaspin who flew above her, picking up speed to match hers and reaching down to take her hands.
They flew, gliding along, together their magic leaving white glistening trails in the air, mixed with a black trail from Jaspin's wing.
They flew higher, reaching the clouds that concealed them from the rest of the world, and being swallowed by the mists, invisible to all.
They returned hours later, back to where the army was gathering, to find the other angels waiting for them.
Lilith touched the ground once again, wings receding into her back as she straightened, grinning widely. It had been a long time since she smiled this way, it had been a long time since she felt true happiness, and the sight of the angels before her, all gathered together, brought her more happiness still.
'You're here' she beamed at them. 'Safe…'
She stepped forward, embracing Reuben, then Gael, then Aski.
'…I'm so glad you're all alright' she sighed into Aski's ear as she held him. 'I'm so glad we are all together again.'
Behind her, Jaspin smiled, and behind Aski, Ena smiled too.
Later, the six of them sat together, the five angels, and the flower maiden sitting between them.
'What are all these people doing here?' Reuben asked Ena.
'This is my army' Ena smiled to him. 'These are my people. I will use them to defeat the *other* one who wishes to stop me. She is gathering her own men, as I am.' She looked to the angels then, looking into their faces, one after the other. 'I know the five of you sought me out to find a cure for the sickness…but there is no cure.'
'No cure?'
The angels tensed at this, all except Gael.
'If there is no cure' Aski voiced, 'then how can we help the people?'
Ena tilted her head back, looking to the sky above them.

‘The reason I did what I did to my family’ she began, ‘was to save them. They will be reborn in another life…and I will see them again another time, in another place.’ She smiled. ‘I did not want them to suffer from this sickness, and so I eased their passing…before they fell victim.’
‘So you're saying the same will happen to these people?’ Lilith asked her indicating the men around them. ‘That they will be reborn in another life?’
‘Yes’ Ena bowed her head smiling. ‘The ones who follow me anyway.’
‘And the ones who do not?’ Lilith asked.
‘They will die’ Ena mumbled, ‘and will not come back. They will return to nothing…there is no place they will go after they cease to be.’
‘So you're saying there is another world we will go to after all this is over?’ Lilith asked.
‘Yes’ Ena said again. ‘When all this is over.’
‘How do you know?’
‘I know it to be true.’
‘How?’
‘Because I feel it to be true’ Ena answered simply.
Lilith sat back, falling silent.
‘So Freya is leading her people into nothingness’ Jaspin said in a level tone.
‘She is’ Ena nodded.
‘But she claims to follow the same religion as you do’ Reuben said. ‘How can that be so?’
‘We are two sides of the same coin’ Ena told him. ‘I am the head.’
‘What are we going to do?’ Aski sighed. ‘This task….how could we possibly succeed?’
‘Do not give into despair’ Ena said turning to him. ‘As long as you follow me and do as I command…everything will be alright.’
‘You say you know this’ Lilith said to Ena, ‘but why should others believe you?’
‘Are you doubting me?’ Ena asked turning to her with a smile.
‘I said I would follow you’ Lilith said, ‘and I will…but……’
‘I know it to be true’ Ena breathed, ‘because I have seen it with my own eyes…’
She held her knee, leaning back and staring at the stars. It was evening, and the twinkling lights in the sky were beginning to glow, as the day slowly died.
‘I know of the future’ Ena spoke quietly, ‘and of the universe.’
‘Universe?’ Reuben echoed. ‘I've never heard the word before.’ The other angels around them looked confused also, all except for Gael.
‘The universe…’ Ena breathed, ‘is a place beyond this world that we know, a place this world exists in, a place made of stars and planets and galaxies.’ She fell silent for a moment, before speaking. ‘I know things…’ she continued, ‘I know more than any of you could possibly imagine, and I know we did not come from any god.’
‘No god?’ Jaspin raised his head. ‘How can that be?’
‘We came from dust’ Ena said, ‘in the beginning…’ she smiled to the clouds, the light breeze lifting her long pale hair that pooled in the ground beside her. ‘Gods always behave like the people who create them. One day in the future, people will be able to look beyond this world, and other worlds, and they will find stars and galaxies, and we will know that in this clockwork existence, everything is governed by the laws of nature, not a god. This planet is microscopic, compared to the rest of the galaxy, which had hundreds of billions of stars, and

billions of other planets, many of which are able to support life. This incomprehensibly vast and indifferent universe is exactly what we would expect to see if left to its own devices, ungoverned by any gods.'

'It all seems so strange' Lilith said in a distant voice.

'Here' Ena said reaching for her. 'Let me show you.'

Ena touched Lilith's forehead, and Lilith was transported to another place.

She saw glowing specs of light all around her in the blanket of darkness. She saw fabulous suns, the most spectacular colours before her, miasmas of purples and greens and oranges. She saw colossal worlds made up of only water, and other worlds made up of great mountains, beneath a magnificent deep blue sky, were great winged reptiles flew over the land. Another world she saw held a purple sea and sky, upon the surface of the water beneath the purple clouds, were reflected the two moons, one small; the other colossal. She saw worlds with other people, within which she saw many things she could not comprehend, and beyond were planets with rings of dust and rocks.

And within this vast existence, she felt emptiness.

'No god…' Jaspin mumbled as Ena drew away from Lilith again. 'Then that means…'

'Yes' Ena nodded speaking to him as Lilith hung her head; shoulders slumped as she sat back. 'We are as alone as we can be.'

'If all you say is true' Reuben said, 'then how did you learn these things?'

'A figure wearing a plague mask told me all I need to know' Ena replied.

'If there is no god' Jaspin finished, 'then were did we come from? We are fallen angels cast down to earth for our sins, Reuben and I remember coming from the celestial plains.'

'The celestial plains are not the heavens you think they are' Ena said to him, 'but another world, and gods are simply ideas created by men, or creatures born naturally that chose to give themselves that name…like the eight…But what makes a true god? I don't suppose anyone would really know.'

Reuben sighed, leaning forward and resting his chin on his hand. 'It all takes faith' he mumbled to himself.

Beside them, one of the soldiers was violently sick. He was pale and skin flaking away. He had thrown up black sludge, and began to tremble as if he were suddenly freezing cold.

Another man came up to him, putting his arm around his shoulders and walking away with him.

'The sickness' Ena breathed, watching the man being led away, '…it will only get worse.'

Later, Lilith wandered alone.

Upon the great plains, the thousands of men were gathered, readying their armour and sharpening their weapons.

Lilith passed through this crowd, heading to the mountains, at the foot of which was a small church, tiny in fact. When Lilith entered it, she found that it was barely one room, either side of the main body of the church, were two smaller rooms, small enough to touch the walls on either side, and all the rooms were empty.

Lilith sat upon the alter in silence for many minutes, holding her hand over the flame of the tall candle that burned beside her. She held her hand there, feeling the fire licking her fingers, but feeling no pain.

‘We angels cannot burn’ Aski spoke up as he entered through the open double doors, sauntering across the tiny hall and towards her. ‘If Freya was the true earth maiden she would have known this.’
‘That is why you did not die when you were tied to the stake’ Lilith replied, as Aski approached her. ‘Then why did you burn when we were branded?’
Aski stopped beside her, gazing at her with a bored expression.
‘We can willingly withdraw the magic if we need to. If I didn’t burn, if I didn’t scar, they would have known.’
‘Did it really hurt you?’
‘Yes.’
‘I'm sorry…’ she whispered.
‘It’s not your fault’ Aski grumbled. ‘It’s just the way it is.’
He paused then.
‘What did you see?’ he asked Lilith suddenly, when Ena touched your forehead.
‘The truth’ Lilith spoke in a distant voice. I saw the universe and the stars and the many different worlds that exist, and I know now that we are alone. There is no god, not the kind we would expect at least, and not in this world.’
Upon the tip of the mountain behind the small church, Reuben and Jaspin stood.
On the other side of the mountain, kept secret and hidden, were the women and children, working hard to care for each other, to care for the sick, to produce food and clothes and care for the animals that would be slaughtered later to feed them.
‘They are safe’ Jaspin spoke, gazing down at them as the strong wind whipped his clothes and ruffled his feathers, wings folded behind him.
Reuben stretched his wings, curling them around his body, his gold feathers shining in the sunlight.
‘I wonder what will happen to them’ Reuben said.

Later that evening, a celebration was held.
‘We must make the most of these merry moments while we can’ Ena told the angels when they asked what was going on, ‘for they won’t last’
‘Are those fireworks?’ Reuben asked as a small cart trundled past them, pulled by two young men.
‘They certainly are’ Ena winked at him. She reached for Gael who stood beside her, taking him by the hand and leaning into him. ‘I cannot wait until nightfall.’

The lights exploded in the sky and the people on the ground cheered. Amongst the crowd, the angels smiled.
They were scattered now, save for Lilith and Jaspin who were together.
He turned to her with a grin, and she looked back at him, as happy as he was. He looked so handsome, and in the prime of his life, with his gentle gaze and steely grey eyes to match his hair. His wings were hidden now, but nonetheless, he looked magnificent.

‘Lilith…’
He reached for her, taking her as he wrapped an arm around her waist, the other hand he used to hold hers. He seemed to be admiring her, as she had admired him.
‘Jaspin…?’
His eyes crinkled at the edges as he gave her a gentle smile, expression warm as he held her.
‘You're beautiful.’
‘You don’t mean that’ she said shyly turning away.
He touched her at the chin, turning her head to face him again, before running his finger down her face and over the scars.
‘You will always be beautiful to me.’
She blushed slightly then as he tucked a strand of her white hair behind her ear, before taking her hand again, and beginning to dance with her.
Around them many others were doing the same, the women and children from the other side of the mountain had travelled around to join the men, and now they rejoiced in this happy moment they had together. Children ran around their feet with sparklers, and upon raised platforms men and women played their instruments and beat their drums. As the happy music filled the air, several of the younger figures clambered awkwardly onto the platform, pulling with them from the ground large boxed they dumped heavily before the musicians. Several young men climbed over the boxed, pulling at the hook in the corner with all their might until it came free; exploding as colourful strips of paper filled the air, falling slowly and onto the heads of the cheering people.
Jaspin and Lilith paused in their dancing, Lilith laughing happily as she pulled pieces of the colourful paper from her hair, reaching for Jaspin and helping him to the same.
Afterwards, they sat on the ridge of a nearby hill, looking over at the lights below them.
‘Today’ Jaspin sighed, ‘life is good. Today…life is easy…’
‘I hope this night never ends’ Lilith spoke wishfully, sitting beside him.
Jaspin handed something to her then, a piece of white paper folded into the shape of a flower, he held her hands as she held the paper flower. His hands burned then as tiny flames licked his fingers, the heat from his spell causing the flower to rise in the air and float away, sailing off into the darkness until it was lost forever.
‘I love you Lilith’ Jaspin voice suddenly, ‘with all my heart and soul.’
Lilith turned to face him, eyes large in the dark.
‘I know’ she breathed, leaning into him. ‘I know…’
Together they watched the people continue their celebration, the dancing, the drinking, the music. Amongst the crowd, they saw Gael, having returned to his usual habit, he was flirting and getting close to several women who were swooning over him, captivated by his handsome face and playful and teasing character.
Elsewhere they saw Reuben and Aski sitting at the same table, drinking and gambling.
In the centre of the mass, a figure stood out.
‘Look’ Jaspin gasped, his breath taken away as he stared in awe. ‘It’s her…’
Lilith blinked as she saw Ena emerge from the crowd, elevated above the heads of the others as she climbed upon another smaller platform in the centre.
She stood tall, smiling to the sky with her eyes closed. She appeared to draw a deep breath then, and a green glow grew from her chest.

A hush fell over the crowed, as the music faded out.
Green tendrils grew outwards from Ena's chest, they produced a slight ringing sound, and shone fabulously, lighting up the whole area in a gentle green light.
The tendrils continued to grow, reaching far and touching the hearts of every man, woman and child.
Then at last, two tendrils came for Jaspin and Lilith.
'It's the spirit of the earth' Jaspin breathed, rising swiftly for his feet as they came for them, moving slowly through the air.
Beside him, Lilith rose too.
'You will rarely see such a thing' Jaspin whispered as the light drew closer.
He threw his head back, drawing a slow breath as the tendril touched him at the chest, as the one beside, touched Lilith, and she was filled with a sudden warmth.
'I feel…' Lilith said. 'I feel….'
'Alive…' Jaspin uttered, eyes closed and smiling.
Lilith hadn't realised that she had felt tired, but now in comparison, she felt suddenly full of strength, as if every piece of her was being healed of wounds she did not know had been there, she felt alive, powerful….
'Liberating' she finished, tilting her head to the clouds, wings unfurling slowly from her body, as Jaspin's beside her did the same.
On the ground below them, Reuben, Aski and Gael's wings were visible also, glowing brightly and producing their own magic, gold, silver and blue, and in the centre of it all, Ena shone.

In the morning, Lilith asked Ena of her different names.
'Why do you have so many?'
'Each of my names represent a different part of me' she replied simply. 'Ena, as you angels know me as, represents the part of me that is protection, as I protect the earth, and those who need me. Kyrah, as my family knew me as, represents the part of me that is love.'
'And the others?' Lilith asked eagerly. 'What are your other names?'
'Well…I have four, and the others are Lotus, I am called this by the holy men, this name represents the afterlife where we all go, and my last name is Zen, that is the earth part of me. That is what everyone else calls me.'
'And the false one?' Lilith asked. 'Freya?'
'She has just one name' Ena said sadly.
'And what does it represent?'
'Emptiness' Ena replied.

After this, Lilith wandered away alone, leaving the other angels behind her to rest. She wandered through the camp, around the tents, around the bodies of men who sat about around their fires, waiting for the battle that Ena promised was to come. Lilith went now to the edges of the camp, where there were the 'sick' quarters. It was where those that had fallen ill were kept.
There were tens of people, men and women and children, the sickness did not discriminate. Lilith walked without fear through the unhappy folk. Some sat, hugging their loved ones to

them, others lay inside the shabby tents, others outside on simple mats rolled out on the floor, others by fires, encouraging others to eat.
'It's alright' Lilith heard one woman tell her companion. 'When we die, we will be reincarnated. That is what *she* says.'
Perhaps the same will happen to us angels also Lilith thought silently to herself, *if we ever succumb.*
Lilith walked on. The smoke here was heavy in the air, and as Lilith continued on, she saw more than just people affected by the sickness. Here was a dog, a mongrel, sitting at the feet of its master, shivering violently, skinny with patches of fur missing.
And then she saw a horse, eyes pale and patches of black upon its chestnut fur.
Strange Lilith thought as she passed it. *Klesa's horse died without symptoms.*
She stopped then, realising something.
Perhaps there were symptoms, but none of us noticed anything wrong. Her eyes dropped to her feet then. *Perhaps the animals have slightly different symptoms to one another.*
She raised her head then, staring sadly down at the pit before her.
Here were the bodies of men and women and children, those that had had succumbed to the sickness, alongside horses, a few dogs, and many sheep and goats.
Several figures clad in black with their faces covered, went about the pit, burning the death inside.
What is going to happen? Lilith thought, feeling numb inside. *How many more will die?*
And then she heard a sound, the sound she dreaded to hear. A call from a horn.
It was the signal to war.
The enemy were here.

Chapter Thirty Six
The First to Fall

Lilith ran through the mass of people, searching for him.
'Jaspin!'
'I'm here' he replied, turning to her as she approached him, breaking through the crowd. 'I know, they are coming.'
'What do we do?' Lilith uttered, slowing down and gazing at him.
Jaspin turned from her, facing the other angels that stood in a circle facing inwards. Ena was there also, part of the circle, standing beside Gael.
'This is the next stage of our journey' Ena breathed, chest rising and falling as she spoke her words. 'This is it.' She turned then, eyes wide as she stared over the hill.
From here, all could see the approaching army.
The women and children were leaving now, huddling together close to their loved ones. They left this place, travelling back to the other side of the mountain they had come from.
Ena tilted her head as a mother and her children hurried past her, as fast as she could through the crowd.

‘You must meet them on the open field’ Ena spoke in a bored tone, addressing the angels. ‘But Lilith’ she turned to her, ‘you must leave with the women and children.’
Lilith’s heart skipped a beat in her chest, and she tensed suddenly. She realised suddenly that the others were watching her. Beside her, Jaspin watched her closely.
‘Alright’ Lilith replied, doing so reluctantly. ‘I will do as you say.’
‘You must leave swiftly’ Ena said to the other four angels, as the soldiers around them began to prepare. ‘She is waiting for you.’

Moments later, Ena was gone, hidden away somewhere, though they knew not where. Gael suddenly appeared tense, worried and feeling lost, without Ena by his side.
Lilith spoke to Jaspin.
‘Are you going to be alright?’ Lilith worried.
‘I'm more worried about you’ Jaspin said turning to her. ‘Lilith…please don’t worry about me.’
‘How could I not?’
Jaspin smiled, but there was no warmth there.
He reached forwards, embracing her gently, before stepping back.
‘I will do what I can’ he said to her. ‘I will do my best to return to you.’
‘But what if you die?’
‘We all die’ Jaspin replied sombrely.
Lilith bowed her head sadly.
‘It’s beginning’ Jaspin said, looking from one side to the other, eyes roving all around. ‘I can feel the false one is here.’
He turned his back to her. Either side of him, stood the other angels, Reuben, Aski and Gael.
They wore no armour. The angels never did, for it would only slow them down.
The dark figures across the field marched forwards, facing the army approaching from the other side.
The angels took off, one after the other.
Lose feathers from their wings floated down upon Lilith, who remained on the ground, watching them depart, and feeling sick to her stomach.
She tore her eyes from the sky, and walked away.

The angels soared over the heads of the men below. They were the first ones to meet their enemy.
‘You will cause unspeakable damage and suffering to so many people!’ Freya called down to them, positioned at the top of the hill with her loyal holy men behind standing immediately behind her, ready to protect her if need be. Ready to die for her.
‘You are the one who will cause damage!’ Jaspin hollered, pointing an accusing finger up at her. ‘You destine the people who follow you only to oblivion.’
Freya’s eye twitched, her body tense.
She turned on her heel, marching towards her people.

She paused for a moment, glancing back at the angels, before walking forwards again, vanishing from view, as she was swallowed by the mass.
‘Archers!’ called the enemy general, raising his sword to signal.
The angels instantly took to the air, flying away as fast as they could, away from the arrows that sailed through the air towards them. Revealing their wings increased their power greatly, but if the vein in their wing was damaged or cut, they would bleed out faster than they could draw ten breaths.
The angels withdrew to the sky, their safe haven. Here they stayed, allowing their soldiers on the ground to attack first, and to disable the archers at the front of the line, before folding their wings to their bodies, and descending fast.
The four of them crashed into the ground, in the thickest part of the opposing army.
Jaspin snarled in primal fury, baring his teeth and slashing with his magic at the men all around him, felling them. The blood seeped to the floor as Jaspin fought. The men that surrounded him turned towards him, raising their weapons. Jaspin cast his hand back, attacking the men behind him, as nearby, the other angels fought.

Lilith let out a cry, stumbling.
She straightened then, holding her shoulder as blood tricked down her arm. She began to shudder.
‘Are you alright?’ asked a young woman tentatively as she was passing.
Lilith raised her head, noticing the woman suddenly.
‘I'm sorry…’ Lilith whispered, hugging herself. ‘I…’ she trailed off.
‘You're one of the angels’ the woman realised. ‘The one with white wings.’
‘Yes’ Lilith replied, lowering her hands and straightening. She turned to the woman, facing her properly now.
‘Your wings’ the young woman said, ‘they're so beautiful.’
‘Are they?’
‘I wish I could be like you.’
Lilith smirked humorously then. ‘No’ she said. ‘You don’t.’
‘Why have you stayed behind’ the woman asked, ‘when the others have gone?’
‘I am unable to use my magic like the others are able’ Lilith replied meekly, watching the hundreds of women and children around her moving forwards, away from the battle, as far as they could go. ‘I am…bound to one of the angels’ Lilith mumbled. ‘I am his shield. I suffer all of his injuries, all of his pain…so that he doesn’t have to. And because of this…I am unable to fight…unable to use my magic…to fight.’
The young woman looked to her arm then, where the blood still trickled.
‘So strange.’
Lilith glanced to her.
‘What is?’

‘Magic’ the young woman replied. ‘It’s so strange.’ She smiled. ‘My name is Emma by the way.’
‘I'm Lilith.’
‘Such a pretty name.’
‘Is it?’
Emma smiled widely. ‘Come’ she said. ‘Let us walk together.’

The four angels fought viciously, and were relentless in their assault, fighting without rest they cut down their enemy like wheat.
But they were not immune to damage.
Lilith hunched over suddenly, coughing up blood and being violently sick.
She hugged herself, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand before straightening again.
‘Are you alright?’
Lilith smiled to Emma.
‘You are kind to worry for me.’
‘How could I not?’ Emma replied. ‘I can see you are suffering.’
‘Yes. I know, but…’ Lilith turned away. ‘There is nothing I can do about it.’
She froze then, suddenly deep in thought.
Or is there?
Through the mass of people, of women and children that slowly made their way forwards and away from the war raging behind them, Lilith saw Ena. She was walking alone, but seemed somehow to be happy. There was a spring in her step, and a smile upon her face.
But why?
A cut appeared on Lilith’s cheek as she stared at the earth maiden, a trickle of blood ran down her face.
Lilith made her way towards her, ignoring Emma as she called after her.
Ena glanced around as Lilith approached.
‘The white angel’ Ena said to her calmly. ‘The look about your face tells me that you want something.’
Lilith stared at her for several moments, at first unable to speak.
‘Ena’ she forced herself. ‘I need to ask you of something.’
‘You would dare to ask me of a favour’ Ena said coldly, slowing to a stop.
Lilith’s heart constricted in her chest, and she feared for a moment that Ena would hurt her. But she continued.
‘Break the bind that ties me to Jaspin. I beg of you. I do not want to be a shield. I want to fight! To use my magic as I am supposed to.’
Ena frowned at her, narrowing her eyes and humming to herself.
‘You…want to be distanced from him?’
‘No. I don’t want to hide here with the woman and children, and want to fight with the men, and want to be with the angels! Please.’ Lilith stepped back, hanging her head. ‘Please she said again. I know I shouldn’t ask anything of you, but I promise’ she said meeting her eyes again, ‘that I never will again in my life.’
Ena smirked then.

‘It doesn’t matter anyway’ Ena said. ‘The angels are on their way back now.’
She reached high into the air above her, tapping a point there with her middle finger, sending out a sphere of light. The sphere rang out loud as it ascended higher towards the clouds, hovering there a few moments, before fading away.
All around them, the people stopped moving.
Ena turned then to Lilith, waving a hand over her. Lilith’s eyes rolled to the back of her head, and she collapsed, her world going dark. She knew no more.

When she woke, the first thing she saw was Jaspin leaning over her.
He looked angry, and then he looked sad.
‘What have you done?’
Lilith blinked up at him. The sky overhead was dark, the clouds thick and heavy with rain and the air around felt humid.
Lilith sat up gingerly, touching herself.
‘I feel different.’
‘Why did you do what you did?’ Jaspin asked her. ‘How could you ask her to use more of her magic when you know that it is limited? How could you knowingly maker her weaker when you know that she is already vulnerable?’
Lilith stared at Jaspin hard. There was blood flecked upon his cheek and in his silver hair, and more that soaked his clothes. But it was not his own, Lilith knew this, for she had suffered all of his injuries.
‘Did you kill many?’ she asked him.
Jaspin grasped her by the shoulders roughly then. ‘The others are furious with you. Why did you do it?’
‘I want to fight!’ Lilith shouted back to him, suddenly angry. ‘I want to be strong, not to hide here and flee like a coward. I am not like that…’ she trailed off.
Jaspin stared at her hard for several seconds, before letting go, rising to his feet and looking away.
‘The battle is over’ he said to the air before him. ‘But the war still rages on. Come’ he said. ‘I want to show you something.’
He unfurled his wings then, taking off swiftly.
Lilith rose quickly to her feet, following through the air after him.

Together they flew over the mountains the women and children had crossed to get away from the fight, and back towards where the two armies had met.
The pair flew quickly. When they reached the battleground, they descended, touching down.
Lilith straightened, withdrawing her wings, as beside her, Jaspin did the same.
All around them, bodies were strewn about. Blood soaked the ground, staining the soil a dark red.
‘Is this what you wanted to see?’ Jaspin asked her. ‘Is this what you wanted?’

Lilith gazed all around her. Everywhere, where body parts dismembered, limbs and heads and sometimes entire torsos cut in half, blood and guts spilled to the floor. Here at her feet was a boy who could not have been older than sixteen; there was an older man, who might have been a grandfather.
'How many?' Jaspin asked her. 'How many of these people had families, loved ones, children, people in their lives who were expecting them to return home by the end of today? Is this' he cast his arms out around him, 'what you wanted to see, what you want to be a part of?'
'Yes.'
Jaspin lowered his arms, turning to her. Lilith looked back at him, facing him.
'I have seen death in my time, and I know people must suffer' Lilith sighed unhappily. 'The sickness cares not who its victim is.' As she said this, she knelt beside one of the dead men, brushing his long hair back carefully with a finger, and seeing his face.
His face was very pale, with skin flaking away, and black veins thick and clearly visible on his neck, spreading up to his cheeks.
'He was made to fight, even though he was dying.'
'What better person to risk their life' Jaspin grumbled.
'I'm sorry' Lilith said, rising to her feet and talking to the ground. 'I did not mean to hurt you, any of you. But I cannot simply stand idly by while others fight for me.' The wind picked up then, blowing back her pure white hair, ruffling the skirt of her dress. 'I want to fight' she said. 'I want to make a difference, not to simply watch others do so.' Her eyes grew distant. 'I want to fight my own battles.'

Later that day, a messenger rode to speak to them. Jaspin met him before he could reach their people.
'Keep your distance' Jaspin had snarled. 'You are an enemy here.'
'I come here only with peaceful intentions' the messenger said to him, his horse tossing its head and prancing on the spot, nervous before the winged angel that faced them.
'Then why do you come here so armed and armoured?'
The messenger removed his helmet, seeing the angel before him clearly now.
'Is it wrong for me to take precautions?' he asked Jaspin.
'I could kill you either way' Jaspin hissed.
'It's alright' Ena said to him, appearing from his side. 'Let him speak.'
Jaspin glanced to her as she approached, stepping back as she sauntered closer to the messenger, doing so without fear.
The other four angels trailed after her as she approached the soldier.
Ena stopped beside the horse, staring up at its rider.
'You wished to speak with me?'
'Freya' the messenger began, 'wishes to speak with you.'
'Does she wish to kill me?'
'She wishes to kill you' the messenger confirmed, 'as you wish to kill her. But she wants to face you herself. She wishes for no more bloodshed. She wishes not for people to fight for her, and to avoid more death and suffering if possible.'

Ena gleamed happily, her eyes shining brightly.
'What I wonderful invitation' she giggled. 'I would be happy to accept.'
The messenger nodded, turning his horse and riding swiftly away without another word.
Ena hugged herself, bowing her head. She giggled again, as the angels around her watched her closely, all tense, all nervous, and some a little frightened.
The moment the messenger was out of sight, Reuben spoke to Ena.
'You mustn't go. You mustn't.'
'Do you fear for me' Ena smiled turning to him.
'You could die.'
Ena giggled, flicking back her long pale green hair and holding her hands behind her back. She swayed on the spot, tilting her head as she considered him.
'Reuben' she smiled. 'Do you fear death?'
'Yes.'
'When then you are a fool.' She turned her back to him, addressing the others. 'There is a temple up on the hill' she spoke quietly. 'This is where I will meet her.' She smiled. 'Take me there. I want all of you to accompany me.'

Ena found her horse Vanity, riding at a gentle pace across the open plains with the five angels walking in formation around her. The grass around them was short, evidence of the wild horses that grazed there.
The people, Ena's people, stayed behind, setting up a camp where they were. The soldiers, now reduced in number, were camped on the outside, the women and children in the centre, and segregated, camped a short distance away, those that had succumbed to the sickness.
They all stayed behind, while the earth maiden and the last five angels travelled to the temple, where they would meet Freya, the false one.
'It's alright' Ena smiled down to Gael beside her. 'The others will be safe. It's me who they want.'
'I know' Gael replied. 'And I trust you.'
Nearby Jaspin cast a glance towards her, but held his tongue. Lilith, who walked behind him, saw how tense he was, and she grew a little nervous for it.
What is going to happen?
She trailed after him in silence, walking with her head down.
Around them the plains were empty, barren. The land around them was hilly, and the slope they walked up was steep. The temple where they were heading now could be seen on the top of the hill, built on the highest point, it overlooked the rest of the world.
Lilith paused, turning back to the land below her.
From where she stood, everything seemed small, microscopic. The army that followed Ena could be seen. They were far now.
The wind picked up, tossing Lilith's white hair about. She drew a slow breath, as the burning sun shone through a break in the clouds, casting its holy light upon the sea, far away into the horizon, bathing the surface in a sheet of gold.
Lilith's eyes were distant, almost bored.
She heard her name being called behind her. Turning, she continued her trek up the slope, catching up with Jaspin who had waited for her.

They walked side by side, lagging behind the others, as the temple above them drew closer and closer.

When they reached it, they found it to be empty.
'They will come' Ena spoke confidently. 'I know this.'
She went away after that, walking with Gael, the two went hand in hand.
'So now I suppose we just wait' Lilith mumbled.
Around her Jaspin, Reuben and Aski stood.
Reuben turned away.
'This is a beautiful temple' Lilith said, gazing about her. At the head of the temple, was an intricately detailed stained glass window, constructed in a circular shape, and designed like an unfurling blue rose. Within the blue glass, through which shone the burning sun, where little white patters, dotted here and there.
It was a magnificent thing to see.
'I've never witnessed such a thing' Lilith breathed, moving up the steps and closer to the glass, holding her hands over her heart. 'Such a magnificent design.'
Behind her, Aski drifted away, following Reuben's path as he wandered to the other rooms within the large temple.
Jaspin approached Lilith, standing by her side. The two were now alone.
'What do you think is going to happen?' Lilith asked.
'One of them will die' Jaspin replied in a dead tone. 'The two have never met before. This will be the first time…and the last. One of them will die' he repeated. 'One of them…will not leave this temple.'
'What…?' Lilith whispered. 'What will happen…if it's Ena?' she turned to Jaspin then, eyes large and shimmering. 'What if Ena is the one who is killed?' she asked. 'What will happen to us?'
Jaspin stared at her for a moment, mouth half open as he frowned. He swallowed then, turning away and looking to the floor. He did not meet her gaze as he spoke.
'If Ena is the one to die…then…we will die with her.'
He breathed slowly.
'Freya will not allow us to escape. If Ena is killed…well…no doubt that when she gets here with her soldiers, she will command them to surround this temple, all the doors…all the windows...' he blinked slowly. 'She will kill us all. One by one. If Ena does not leave this temple…than neither do we.'
Lilith stifled a sob, turning away and clapping a hand over her mouth, tears running down her cheeks.
'I'm afraid' Lilith whispered. 'I'm afraid of death…afraid of what I don't know.'
She felt a hand touch her shoulder then, turning to face Jaspin, who smiled at her kindly.
'Do not be frightened' she spoke calmly to her. 'If we are all to die here today, then we go wherever Ena goes. To another palace.'
Lilith stared into his face. His grey eyes were gentle, his expression was tender.
'Are you not afraid?' she asked him. 'Even in the slightest?'

Jaspin blinked to her.
'No' he said. 'Not in the slightest.
Lilith bowed her head.
'I'm sorry. I'm sorry for being weak.'
'It's only natural to feel this way' Jaspin said, letting go of her and turning to face the great stained glass window before them. 'Things are different now' he said to her. 'We are no longer bound to each other. When next I fight...you will join me.'
'Yes' Lilith breathed. 'I want that…'
'If Ena dies, and we are bound to die too…then we die fighting.'
'Yes' Lilith said again. 'I want that.'

Reuben wandered through the lonely temple. He had been to many temples in his life, but this one felt different. It was a vast building, with many rooms. But the rooms were empty, and the place felt neglected. Perhaps it had once been a building where many people came to, prayed at, filled with holy figures that blessed the people that passed through their doors. But it was clear at a glance, that those days were long gone.
Reuben saw the little cracks in the rock here and there; the little details told the observant its story. At first glance this was a grand building, but on closer inspection, it was a sad building.
Reuben tilted his head as he saw a sliver of green through the crack. He saw a fuzzy caterpillar sitting upon the wall nearby.
He craned his head back then, seeing in the rafters above him, several nests, which were now empty. Reuben recognised them as swallows nests.
He walked on, coming to a small stream that ran into the temple, forming a shallow pool.
Reuben sat on the low wall, leaning back on his palm and gazing into the water, where he saw hidden amongst the thick moss, little newts, hanging in the water.
He stared into the pool for a time, until Aski found him.
Sitting beside Reuben, Aski leant back, hugging his knee to him.
'Are you afraid?' he spoke at last to Reuben.
'No' Reuben answered quietly, his voice echoing in the still and empty hall.
'I am.'
Reuben stared into the water for several seconds, before turning to him.
'I want to see Vera again' Aski whispered. 'More than anything.'
Reuben watched him silently. He did not speak.
'Do you think we will die here today?' Aski spoke tentatively.
'No' Reuben answered shortly, 'because I have complete faith in Ena.'
Aski listened, staring at the ground beneath him.
'She is here' he breathed, sensing it at the same time as Reuben.
The two rose to their feet then, doing so simultaneously. They marched swiftly down the corridor, moving with purpose, as they headed to the centre of the temple, where the largest room was.
'The false one' Reuben grumbled. 'I knew she would not waste time in getting here.'

Ena was standing at the edge of the hall, the five angels standing in formation behind her, all tense, fixated on the figures standing on the other side of the hall and facing them.

Ena threw her head back then, laughing out loud as if she found something terribly amusing.
Opposite her Freya narrowed her eyes, baring her teeth in anger.
Ena stepped forward, and Freya did the same.
The two met in the centre of the hall, both moving away from the safety of the figures that would protect them.
Silence rang in the vast hall, as the two maidens regarded each other, maintaining a distance between them. Ena was a head taller than Freya, her skinny frame and sunken eyes made her look sick, made her look weak, almost as if a firm wind could push her aside and break her.
On the other hand, Freya looked strong. About twenty three in age, she was far older than Ena. Her short blonde hair was swept back. The gold bar around her neck and each of her wrists glinted in the beam of sunlight, which shone down upon them through the conical glass tower from above. Around her neck where two metallic snakes intertwined, their tails formed a downwards point like that of a spear.
She looked normal compared to Ena, who some might have believed wasn't even human, who was unnaturally tall with very long limbs, fingers and toes.
Freya untied the black shawl from around her waist, throwing it aside. Her long purple skirt swayed in a light breeze.
She crossed her arms, lifting her chin high and considered her.
Ena smiled widely, tilting her head, allowing her long pale green hair fall over her face.
Behind her, the five angels stared unblinking. The edges of Jaspin's eyes twitched, and Gael balled his fists.
'We meet' Freya began. 'At last.'
'At last' Ena echoed. She hunched her shoulders, giggling into her hands, an action that seemed to greatly irritate Freya.
'There is no backing down' Freya spoke to Ena firmly. 'Today, one of us will die.'
'It will be you' Ena smiled, in a manner that seemed almost to be friendly; as if she was talking to someone she knew well, and had loved for most of her life. But Freya did not react the same.
'I *won't* let you escape' Freya hissed. 'You are all going to die here.'
'Is that right?'
'My soldiers have this temple surrounded' Freya informed Ena casually. 'I will kill *you*. And *they* will your angels.'
At the back of the hall, Jaspin and Lilith shared a glance.
'We are surrounded' Jaspin whispered to her. 'I knew she would do this.'
Lilith stared at Jaspin wide eyed, before turning back to the maidens before them.
'I have brought you here' Freya spoke aloud, addressing all of them. 'I have brought you all here, and here is where you will die!'
Ena giggled again.
Freya flicked her long skirt back, taking a sideways stance to Ena.
Freya walked slowly to the side, her attention sliding away from Ena, who followed her closely with her eyes, never looking away.
Freya suddenly whipped her hand up, shooting a spell without warning towards Ena, who cast her hand up, deflecting the attacking magic in the very last moment, and doing so with a smile upon her face.

Behind Ena the angels tensed suddenly, staring wide eyed, muscles knotted, fists balled. They all let out the breath they had been holding. They continued to watch, waiting for the next thing that would happen. One of them would die, on the agreement that no others would die on their behalf, no others would be harmed.

Freya stopped walking suddenly, turning to face Ena again.

For a moment nothing happened. And then Ena charged for Freya, moving at impossible speeds and swiping at her. Freya threw her head back, leaping away quickly to avoid as the magic slashed through the air, aimed at her throat.

Ena lunged for her, again and again. Freya dodged these next attacks, before retaliating. She cast her hand out, fingers splayed as a bright red light exploded before their eyes.

The angels and the holy men on the other end of the hall all shielded their eyes. When the light faded, they saw that Ena was gone.

For a few seconds they all glanced about in search of her. And then she suddenly appeared, hovering in the air above all of them. Ena giggled again, smiling warmly down at Freya on the ground.

'That was a close one' Ena said.

The muscles in Freya's face twitched, and her eyes burned. She turned to face Ena. A wind picked up around her, lifting her hair and clothes as she began to rise in the air. Her feet left the ground, and she rose, coming to Ena's level before her.

Lilith watched in awe, never having seen such magic before. Her breath was caught in her throat.

There were a series of loud bangs and flashes of light. Ena and Freya moved quickly, doing so so fast that the mind could not process what was happening. There was an almighty crash, and glass and rubble and dust fell from the ceiling.

The maidens appeared on the floor again, charging for each other. There was a stream of blood, but none could see from whom it had come from. Ena threw her hands to the floor then, and the very stone itself warped, forming its shape into a spear point and shooting towards Freya. But Freya turned out of the way just in time, throwing her hands to the side and breaking the stone point that had frozen now, and causing it to crumble into many tiny pieces. Ena vanished again as Freya made to strike her. Freya was suddenly thrown to the wall, held back by Ena's magic as she suddenly appeared before her, holding her there.

Ena smiled. The giant statue of a robed holy man, standing on the pedestal above them moved suddenly. Freya hearing the crack of the rock as the statue moved, looked up suddenly. She had no time to escape as the giant statue plunged the spear downwards, into her shoulder, right through her body and leg and into the floor below.

Freya gasped in shock, mouth opening and closing her mouth like a fish out of water, as Ena bowed her head, stepping back and whispering a short prayer under her breath as she did.

As the figures around them saw what had happened, there was an explosion of noise as the holy men began to shout.

The stone statue jerked the long spear sharply upwards and out of Freya's body. Freya fell to her knees. One of the holy men charged forwards towards them. Ena leapt back as the figure grabbed Freya before she fell. Ena felt arms wrap around her from behind, recognising Gael's touch as he flew backwards with her, back behind the wall of angels, and back to safety.

The hall erupted into chaos as holy men began to charge forwards, drawing their weapons with the intent of killing the angels, and the angels in turn, fought back as confusion was sown.
Freya was taken away, carried by the holy figure that had been the first to reach her; she disappeared from view as the fighting back. Flashes of light and bangs and screams and blood and cries. Everything moved so fast, only Gael was the one not to fight. As he held Ena in his arms, she suddenly went limp.
He called her name, kneeling as he held her and shaking her by the shoulder.
She had slipped into unconsciousness.
Gael gathered her long hair up hastily, he lifted her in his arms and stretching his wings.
He used a huge portion of his magic to blast a hole in the wall, escaping through it before anyone knew what was going on.
The archers outside tried to fire at him, but they were confused and disorganised as news of Freya's defeat spread like wildfire. With her fallen, they broke formation, and the four angels behind Gael were able to escape moments later unharmed, though some still tries to shoot them down.
The five angels soared over the landscape, led by Gael who carried the unconscious Ena in his arms; they flew away, away from the temple, away from even the people that followed Ena. They would not put them in danger, it was Ena that the enemy wanted, and so they fled to somewhere desolate, somewhere hidden, where Ena could recover. The people, the army that followed her were completely forgotten. Perhaps they would meet them again, at a later time when they were able, when it was safe. It would take the enemy a long time to find the angels, wherever they went. But perhaps they could hide, just long enough for Ena to become strong again.
'Please be alright' Gael whispered to Ena tenderly, holding her close to him as he beat his wings hard, struggling with the effort of carrying the extra weight. 'Please stay with me.'
But Ena was completely unresponsive. Her long pale green hair unravelled and fell free, whipping in the wind and becoming tangled around Gael's wing as he flew.
Around him, the other four angels flew in formation, all alert, keeping a look out, for they were most vulnerable now than they ever had been.

Chapter Thirty Seven
The Clouds

Freya was carried in the arms of the holy man, out of the temple and just beyond the doors.
He dropped to his knee, holding her firmly and gazing into her face.
But it was too late. She was already dead.

The holy man stared at her for ages. Around him the other holy figures began to gather, looming like ghosts over the kneeling man and the maiden.

There was a rumble in the distant land. The holy man raised his head, seeing the sky above them slowly beginning to darken, as the thick black clouds rolled in, blotting out the light from the sun.
The world began to grow dark.

Freya's body was burned shortly after. The pyre surrounded by hundreds of holy figures, all facing inwards, all utterly silent, with their black hoods raised.
They mourned for their loss, and the angels, flew further and further away.

Chapter Thirty Eight
Search for the Angels

After Freya's body was cremated, and her flesh and bones no more than ash on the smoking pyre, the holy man that had carried her from the temple before she died, left the congregation, to stand on the edge of the woodland.
Here he stood for many minutes, utterly still with head bowed and deep in thought.
He was interrupted by another sometime later, darkness had fallen, and the stars were shining in the dark cosmos above. They would have been beautiful, but the thick dark clouds that had gathered blocked out all the stars, and all the light from the moon.
It was a frightening world they were in now. If it were not for the burning torches the other holy soldiers carried behind him, they would have been in total darkness.
'Samuel' said the figure from behind him.
Samuel raised his head, then turned to face the man behind him.
'The men follow your word' Christophe said.
'My word?' Samuel replied dully.
'Yes' Christophe answered. 'You are the oldest among us, the best fighter, and her most loyal man.'
Samuel blinked slowly. His eyes were only half open; they were bored, tired, his whole body sagged.
'She trusted you' Christophe went on, 'above all others.' He fell silent as he let his words sink in. 'She would have wanted you to lead her men' he finished. 'To whatever end.' Christophe took a deep breath. 'Our men' he said, 'will be loyal to her to the bitter end.' He bowed his head, gazing at Samuel deeply. 'Many of our men believe she is still alive' he finished, 'and that her spirit speaks to you. Whatever command you give us, will be as good as if it came from her own mouth.' Christophe waited a moment. 'You're words' he said, 'are now hers too.'

‘My words?’ Samuel repeated again. ‘…Yes…’
He straightened up, looking at Christophe properly now.
‘We must not lose focus’ Samuel said. ‘We must hunt down these angels, and kill them and their maiden, before they cause any further harm.’ He gritted his teeth, balling his fists as he was consumed by a sudden wave of anger. ‘We must kill them’ he said, ‘before they harm anyone else.’
‘What of her army?’
‘We must try to save them if we can. She promises them a new life after this one? This is folly’ he growled. ‘Many are willing to die for this lie.’
‘Do you really think it is a lie?’ Christophe asked.
‘Of course’ Samuel replied shortly. ‘How could anyone know what will come after this life. There is no way that even *she* could ever know.’
Samuel returned to his men a short while later. Every one of them stood to attention facing him, listening closely for what he was about to say.
‘We must call on the rest of the men’ Samuel told them. ‘We will go beyond the mountains where this army waits.’
‘What will we do?’ one of the other soldiers spoke up. ‘Will we fight them?’
‘No’ Samuel shook his head. ‘We will only guard them. We wish for no more to die, but her army must do no more damage, to themselves or to us.’
‘What if they resist us?’ the same man spoke.
Samuel bowed his head. He cast his hand out, barking a command.
‘Summon the others’ her ordered. ‘We will surround this army and keep them where they are. We need no more joining their cause. As for the angels and this other maiden, we will hunt them down and find them no matter the cost.’
The men all bowed to him. One of them, a messenger, ran to get a horse. Mounting quickly he wheeled the mare around, kicking his heels into the creature’s flank and moving away, wanting to move fast though he could not. The world around them was as dark as the heart of a cave, and the messenger could only move at a trot, lighting his way with the burning torch he carried.
The others stayed behind, to wait for the arrival of the rest of their army. In the meantime, Samuel waited with them, his profile dark and brooding. He clung to the trees around him, deep in thought for their immediate future.
A short distance away, Christophe watched him in silence as Samuel muttered to himself.
‘Kill the angels’ Samuel whispered, ‘…kill the maiden….’

When the darkness came, and the clouds above thickened in seconds to great rolling masses that blocked out the sky completely, people all over the world grew frightened. And when night fell, their terror increased tenfold. Even Ena’s army was afraid. Afraid of what they

didn't know, afraid of the sudden change, afraid of the sudden absence of the angels and the maiden they followed. The maiden so many had already died for.
Even Ena's army was afraid. And they began to fight amongst themselves.
'We're all going to die!' a man screamed. 'Ena has left us! The angels have left us!'
He was backhanded hard by one of the other men, a leading figure. A General.
'Keep yourself together man' the General hissed. 'We have to stay calm! For the sake of the others!'
As the unfortunate soul was subdued, Emma listened to their fading cries; sitting huddled together in the crowd. The only lights that shone now were from the torches. If not for them, their world would have been utterly dark.
'What is going to happen to us?' spoke a timid voice. 'Are we going to die?'
Emma turned to face the frightened girl beside her.
'No Cynthia' Emma replied. 'We are going to live.'
'Is it true the angels have left us?' the young boy beside her spoke. 'And the earth maiden also?'
'I don't know' Emma said, addressing the young boy called Hector. 'But we must not lose faith.'
'What about me?' an older boy spoke up glumly, turning towards her. He had been sitting a short distance away, but was listening intently. 'Am I…going to live…?'
Charles was a boy who had lived his entire life not knowing his parents. He had lived on the streets, and had lived a hard life. He was probably about seventeen. He did not know when his birthday was.
'Am I' he asked again, 'going to live?'
Emma watched him sadly. Even in the faint light flickering from the torches around them, his face could be seen clearly enough. The sickness could be recognised. His pale skin was flaking away, and the gruesome black veins had crept as far as his cheeks, looking almost like the patterns on a leaf.
'What will happen to me?' Charles asked. 'Am I going to fade away and die like the rest?'
'You mustn't think like that' Emma hissed sharply at him. 'No matter how we all live' she said, 'we all go to the same place when we die. That is…if we follow Ena, if we be loyal to her, and trust her word.' She paused. 'We must never lose faith in her' Emma shook her head. 'The earth maiden will take us to a new life when we die, whether or not we have had the sickness. We will all go to this new world together.'
Charles did not reply. He simply watched her, returning her gaze sullenly.
Beside Emma, a young girl called Polly, just four in age, huddled closer to her. Polly's parents had both been lost to the sickness. Their bodies blessed by Ena's magic before they departed, before they left this world. Polly had been told that her parents were already in the new world, and were waiting for her in the afterlife. Polly's time was short. Her symptoms were worse than Charles. It was only a matter of time.
'Everything is going to be alright' Emma said to her. 'Trust me. Just stay with me. I'll look after you.'
The child held back a sob, clutching tightly onto the skirt of Emma's dress. She didn't speak.
'I'm going to sleep' Hector spoke up.
'How can you sleep at a time like this?' Charles asked him with a scowl.

‘Because I'm tired’ Hector grumbled sharply back, lying down on his side with his back to the others. ‘Wake me up when its morning’ he mumbled.
‘Perhaps we should all be getting to sleep’ Emma said, reaching down to Polly and lifting her in her arms, holding her close.
‘I couldn’t…’ Charles moaned. ‘Not at a time like this.’
Emma watched Charles move away from her through the crowd then, going to be alone. Emma thought that perhaps he felt as if his time was near, and that he wanted to be alone to die. Perhaps…
She bowed her head, sitting back against the rock behind her and closing her eyes. Cynthia shuffled up to Emma as she became still, holding her close as she once did her own mother. Life was hard for the orphans that were here. But there were always those to care for them, elders, the soldiers that would fight for them, and the mothers who would offer them comfort, many of which had lost their own families and children.
Emma hugged the children tighter to her, Polly on her lap, and Cynthia by her side. She gritted her teeth, fighting back tears as she remembered the way she once held her own children, before they were taken from her.
I love you she thought. *I love you all.* But she did not speak the words. Instead, she became silent, and allowed herself to sleep, the two children close to her, and Hector nearby.
Their camp fell silent, as calmness spread, and those that feared the darkness were silenced, one way or the other. Things became peaceful. Until morning came.

In a place, far away from anyplace known, was a woman.
She sat alone in her manor home, wearing a stunning dress of deep emerald. Her long straight black hair fell about her as she leant forwards on the desk, crying into her folded arms.
The room around her was silent, and dark, and she was completely alone. Save for one, her dog, a hybrid with a stray wolf. It had a wild look about it, but was as domestic and loyal and tame a beast as its mother had been, but was as fierce as the stray wolf that had fathered it.
It sat on the other side of the bedroom now, watching its master with concern. But the woman ignored it. In her mind, she was in another place entirely, a darker place. One of misery and grief.
She pushed herself up from the desk, eyes heavy and head throbbing.
She had cried so many tears, that she had no more left in her.
‘Why?’ she whispered to the air around her. ‘Why did this have to happen? It isn’t fair…’
She bowed her head, body wracked with sobs, but no tears fell.
‘Why did you have to die Freya? It should have been me.’

Gerald strode through the bustle. All around him the guests were having a good time, and the golden hall was beautifully lit in all its colours. It seemed sometimes that the room itself was

glowing in a gentle and warm light. The darkness beyond the large windows outside could not penetrate the ambience, and everything was comfortable.
Gerald weaved his way through the crowd, following the silver patterns painted into the floor. All around him was the rolling and continuous noise of many people speaking over one another, laughing and joking as they drank and danced and ate and socialised. But he paid attention to none of this.
'Where is she?' he asked in an irritable tone, speaking to the young male servant who followed after him.
'I don't know' the servant replied hastily, moving quickly to keep up as Gerald made his way through the party, the people all beautifully dressed around them. 'One of the guests says she saw her leaving the building. She looked upset. Perhaps something was wrong.'
'Perhaps' Gerald copied.
He left the crowd, ascending the tall stairs that led to the higher floors above them.
Halfway up he turned. From here he could see over the heads of the guests as they enjoyed themselves.
'I do not see her' he observed, turning his head slowly to the side.
The young servant turned then as another servant appeared, one a little older.
'I'm sorry to bother you' the second servant bowed as he spoke to Gerald. 'She has left. One of the coachman said she headed back home.'
Gerald furrowed his brow, grinding his teeth.
'Thank you' he said back to the man. 'You may go now.'
'Will you be going home now?' the older servant asked him. 'Should I get a carriage ready?'
'Yes' Gerald mumbled. 'Yes. You do that.' He looked away again. 'I'll be along in a moment.'
The older servant bowed now, turning and walking away to ready another carriage. The young servant hung back, watching Gerald in case of further order. When none came, he too moved away and left.
Gerald hardly noticed either of them leave. Instead his attention was fixed on the crowd before him.
'Nina' he whispered. 'What has happened……what do you know?'

He left the celebration shortly after. Hardly anyone noticed him leave. They were all distracted with their own fun. And that was the way Gerald wanted it to be.
It was dark outside, and he marched down the steps from the manor, his footsteps crunching on the gravel beneath him as he went, heading towards the waiting carriage.
Either side of him were large gardens with well tended hedges and flower beds, all invisible now in the gloom. There were ponds and lakes. Gerald could hear the trickle of a fountain as water from a statue was sprayed upwards, falling into pool below.
The carriage rocked as he climbed into it. The footman closing the door behind him as the driver snapped the reins, urging the horses onwards.
'Where too sir?' the driver of the carriage asked, speaking through the slit behind him as the carriage trundled onwards.

‘Home’ Gerald answered shortly, sitting back with his arms crossed and his mind a haze. ‘And be quick’ he added. ‘I need to see her soon.’
The journey was fairly short, but took them through rocky landscape and forests. When they reached their destination, Gerald rose before the carriage stopped, opening the door himself and stepping out.
‘Return to the party’ Gerald told the driver, handing him a small pouch of coins. ‘Explain my absence to anyone who asks.’
‘Of course’ the driver bowed. ‘And thank you.’
Gerald nodded mutely as the driver snapped the reins. The two black stallions that pulled the carriage trotted away, heads held high. They disappeared into the night.
Gerald let out a weary sigh, turning towards the dark manor that loomed over him now, a formidable building, and a gloomy one, especially on dark nights like these.
Home.
Gerald had lived here for many years, having inherited it from his own father after his death. Now this vast property, and all the wealth that came with it, was his to own. He only shared it with one other.
Gerald approached the wrought iron gates, opening them slowly; they creaked on their hinges as he shut them behind him. On hearing this, the hounds that were kept in the kennels out back began to howl. These were the hounds used to hunt foxes and deer in the woods nearby. They would also deter intruders; their calls alone were enough to do so.
The garden at the front was relatively small, with only a few neatly kept hedges and flower beds, a lot like the garden of the manor he had just left.
Gerald approached the steps at the entrance, opening the front door and stepping in. The entrance hall inside was completely dark, the rooms were vast and the ceilings tall. Gerald heard a sound then. The sound of a door creaking as it was pushed open. The sounds of nails on wooden floors, coming down the stairs, then a low growl, as the creature came closer.
‘Down’ Gerald commanded in a firm voice.
The wolf hybrid immediately became submissive, puppy like, as it crouched its body, ears back and wagging its tail in circles. Gerald ignored it, marching past and up the stairs. He went to the bedroom, seeing a figure sitting back in the chair, watching the door as if waiting for him.
Gerald stepped into the dark room, moving closer to the figure.
‘Nina’ he said. ‘What has happened? Why did you leave?’
‘Gerald’ Nina spoke slowly. ‘I have some bad news. Freya…she’s dead.’

Emma woke to the sound of shouting in the distance. She opened her eyes slowly, lifting her head up as she listened closely.
There was shouting, and then, panicked cries.
Emma whipped around, still holding the girls close to her, she saw in the distance towards the hills, people beginning to run, some grabbing weapons and hollering, others simply fleeing.
She rose swiftly, placing Polly firmly on the ground and standing on her tip toes, trying to see over the heads of the crowd that stood around her.

‘I can’t see’ she hissed to herself. ‘What's going on?’
‘Quick’ Hector said moving up to her. ‘Lift me on your shoulders.’
Emma did so hastily, grabbing him and lifting him up.
‘What is it?’ Emma asked him, voice shaking slightly as she held him in place. ‘What do you see?’
Hector was silent. Emma as she held him could feel his body tense.
‘Hector?’
‘There’s an army’ he stammered. ‘It’s them! They’re coming this way!’
Emma placed him on the ground quickly, lifting Polly instead and grabbing Cynthia’s hand.
‘Where are we going?’ Polly sobbed, frightened as the people began to panic around them, shouting to one another and running in all directions.
‘We have to get out of here’ Emma hastened, pulling Cynthia with her as she marched on. ‘Hector! Keep up!’
Hector hurried, struggling to keep her in sight as Emma fought her way through the crowd.
‘Where will we go?!’ he shouted up at her.
‘Away! Anywhere! Anywhere we can go. We must hide. Live!’
Hector stumbled, righting himself and jogging on. He reached out and grasped the hem of her dress, holding on tightly so that he wouldn’t lose her as they fought their way through the rushing crowd.
Around them they saw several men mounting their horses, forgetting all their personal belongings, forgetting even their weapons.
‘Why won’t they fight?!’ Hector spoke up. ‘Why?! Are they afraid?’ Hector gritted his teeth, tears of fear brimming in his eyes. ‘Where are the angels?!’ he called out. ‘Where is the maiden?! They are supposed to protect us!’
Emma cast a desperate glance back at him, clutching Polly to her and never letting go of Cynthia’s hand, who began to cry and sob in fear.
Emma paused for a moment and looking all around her, wondering where to go.
She made to go forwards again, seeing in the distance men riding away.
Emma pulled back suddenly, hearing shouts before her. She watched closely, as several mounted soldiers fell from their horses.
‘They’re ahead of us!’ Emma realised with horror. ‘The enemy. They’ve circled us. We’re trapped here!’
Instead of running, Emma knelt, hugging the children to her, pulling Hector close to her and simply waiting as screams ensued all around them.
Their own people were pushed back, and as the vast net of swords and bows were closed in around them, Emma looked up.
She saw the wall of enemy soldiers marching forwards.
Her breath caught in her throat as she clutched the children tighter to her in dread, watching the armed soldiers drawing ever closer. But they did not attack.
As one of the men drew close enough to strike her, he stopped then. Hector dared to look up, glancing around Emma’s body as she knelt holding all of them to her.
The soldier did not attack, only stood over them, revealing nothing in his expression.

After a time he looked away, towards the other soldiers who advanced, tightening the net further. As Emma watched, she saw that only the men who fought back were attacked and killed. Those that lay down their arms and submitted were ignored.
They're guarding us Emma realised with mounting fear. *They're keeping us. But why? What for? What do they want?*

Gerald stirred the liquid in the glass with a silver spoon, moving across the kitchen and handing the glass to Nina.
She took it silently, sitting back in the large wooden chair with a black shawl wrapped around her body to keep her shoulders covered, still in the deep emerald dress she had worn to the party. The house was cold. The large windows rattled as the wind blew, the air outside was chilly and the night dark.
Through the window, shining between a sliver in the clouds, the moon fought to be seen. By this faintest light, Gerald used to see his way through the dark kitchen, throwing fire upon the hearth and lighting it. The wooden shavings quickly caught the flames, and the larger pieces of wood began to burn.
Gerald straightened up, moving away as the kitchen was cast into a golden glow. Nina closed her eyes, looking for a moment as if she were in peace, basking in the fire's warmth. The wolf hybrid hung at the edge of the kitchen, sitting in the open doorway just out of reach of the fire's light, though its white coat could still be seen as a white haze in the dark.
Gerald pulled up a chair, the wooden legs scraping on the tiled floor as he moved to sit next to Nina.
She opened her eyes.
Gerald waited for her to speak, leaning forwards in his chair with his elbow resting on his knee.
'It isn't fair' she whispered at last. 'It isn't fair. Freya was……Freya was…'
Nina bowed her head, drawing in a shuddering breath and trying to compose herself, trying to control herself, not to let her emotions break free. So often she fought to keep herself in check, her anger and sorrow trapped behind high walls. Always.
'How could they…' Nina whispered, 'how could they do this?'
'Who?' Gerald asked her. 'Who has done this?'
'The angels' Nina breathed, 'and…the one….the….*flower maiden* she calls herself……Ena is her name, though she has several.' Nina paused, her body still, her mind deep in thought. 'The angels…there are only five of them left. They call her Ena. Her family…are dead…she killed them all herself….they called her Kyrah. Lotus is the name she is given by the holy figures, the men and women, the soldiers that follow her, a name that to her symbolises the afterlife. And Zen, is the name known by everyone else. This name symbolises the earth.'
'And her other names?' Gerald asked. 'Ena and Kyrah? What do they symbolise?'
'Protection and love' Nina replied. A sneer passed her lips. But it was only for an instant. 'Lies' Nina whispered, speaking calmly. 'They are all lies. She would lead many to their

deaths…the angels that follow her also…so loyal….but it does not matter……not to her, nothing matters.'
She paused then, bowing her head.
'Poor Freya' she whispered. 'She was so frightened. She knew she was going to die when…' she broke off suddenly. 'It's so unfair' she moaned. 'It's so unfair. Freya didn't deserve this. Freya was good. She….she only meant well….she didn't deserve to die so violently…to have her life cut short when she was still so young.'
'What will you do?' Gerald asked her, speaking in a low voice. 'Will you act upon this?'
'No' Nina whispered. 'I dare not. I dare not to even visit her grave, for fear of meeting *them*.'
'Do you believe they will have an interest in you?'
Nina shook her head slowly, not looking at Gerald. 'Who knows what those creatures think. I do not believe they are even from this earth. I believe they were born in the heavens, but were fallen from grace when they betrayed god.' She paused then. 'Usurpers' she whispered narrowing her eyes. 'They have no place in heaven or on earth.'

Emma clutched Polly to her. The terrified child huddled into Emma, too scared to look up as she hid her face from the world. Emma held her tightly, sitting on the ground with Hector and Cynthia either side of her. Emma tensed suddenly, glancing up nervously as a soldier passed her by. He was one of those that had trapped them here, one of the ones that guarded them now. His gaze lingered on her as he went, before moving on.
'What's going to happen to us?' Hector asked her in a quietly. 'Are they going to hurt us?'
'I don't know' Emma answered back in a hushed voice. 'I don't know…'
'I'm scared' Cynthia sobbed, shuddering as she held onto Emma.
'Don't be' Emma cooed back, reaching out to caress her cheek tenderly. 'We are together aren't we?'
Cynthia nodded sadly.
Emma patted the child's head gently, before looking away again, towards the soldier that had passed them, and beyond, to a small group that surrounded some of the other men.
Samuel was one of the men standing, the man that had carried Freya from the temple; the man that had held her, as she died in his arms. Her General, and one of Freya's most loyal men.
'Freya's death will not be forgotten' he growled. 'Freya *will* be avenged.'
Around him, his soldiers watched. Christophe bowed his head slightly, staring intently at the men before them, the men they surrounded. The men on their knees.
'What will we do with them?' one of Samuel's holy men asked him.
The kneeling men stared back at the others, waiting for the reply, waiting for whatever was to happen to them.
Samuel stood over them, taller than the rest of the men around him.
'Look' he indicated one of the men.
The man raised his head, gritting his teeth with hatred in his eyes. There was no fear in him
'Look at his flaking skin' Samuel said. 'And this one' he said pointing to another. 'He shivers, and is pale.' He grimaced then. 'They are sick' he finished turning his back. 'Kill

them to end their suffering. And kill the sick horses too, and the livestock and dogs. Anything you find with the sickness…we don't want it to spread.'
'Yes sir' Christophe nodded as Samuel marched away. He drew his sword and stepped forward with several other of the men.
Emma placed her hands over Cynthia and Hector's eyes, turning their heads away so that they could not see.
When the deed was done, Christophe went to join Samuel again.
'Why would Ena want to keep these men alive?' Samuel asked him as Christophe sat beside him on the wooden bench, 'and the animals too. Why would she allow creatures to live and suffer like this?'
Christophe heaved a heavy sigh, leaning forwards and resting his elbows on his knees. He suddenly felt very very tired.
'I don't know' he groaned. 'Perhaps she thought that she could help them.'
'No' Samuel shook his head wearily. 'No. Those with the sickness…' he trailed off for a moment, chewing his lip in thought. 'They cannot be helped' he finished, before bowing his head and falling silent.

It was daytime, or at least it should have been. The dark clouds above had only grown thicker, manifested the darkness as they grew like a plague. Thicker, always growing thicker, growing darker, and casting the world into shadow.
Nina leant back in her seat, a wicker chair with a high back, lined with cushions to make it softer. She gripped the arms of the chair as she sat there, closing her eyes slowly and breathing a heavy sigh. It was cold. She wore a shawl draped across her shoulders, but none the less she shivered. There were goose bumps over her arms, but she did nothing to try to warm herself.
Gerald stepped into the garden, standing at the end of the winding stone path that led to the patio in which Nina sat in silence. He stood there for a moment, watching her, thinking.
After a time he decided to make himself known, and he took his step forward, passing the nameless wolf-hybrid that clung to the shadows, lying down tucked beneath a hedge. The creature watched him with deep eyes as Gerald went by, completely ignoring the beast. The hybrid lowered its head again, resting its jaw upon the ground, utterly silent.
Gerald approached the patio, coming up behind her.
'Nina' he spoke gently.
The only indication that she had heard him, was a slight turn of the head. It was ever so slight, Gerald might have missed it.
'I want life to continue as normal' Nina spoke in a far away voice. 'I want to act as if nothing has happened…as if my sister were still alive.'
'Nina….'
'It's the only way I can deal with this pain…'
Gerald walked around her, kneeling before her chair and taking her hands in his.
'I will do…whatever you ask of me' he spoke sincerely to her. 'If you asked me to die, if you asked me to go to the ends of the earth…then I would do that…for you.'

‘I know you would’ Nina whispered back. ‘I never doubted you. Not even for a moment.’
She shivered then, letting out a deep breath that fogged in the air before her.
‘It’s getting colder’ she said.
‘I know’ Gerald replied. ‘I noticed it too.’
Gerald raised his head, looking to the beautiful garden around them.
‘Where are the green finches?’ he asked. ‘They should be out by now.’
‘No’ Nina whispered, opening her other hand, revealing a dead finch lying in her palm. ‘They too were claimed by the sickness.’
Gerald stared down at the small lifeless body if the finch, revealing nothing in his expression.
‘It’s not just the birds’ Nina said in a distant voice, ‘it’s the plants also. Look’ she said. ‘Over there.’
Gerald turned, seeing the white roses near them. They had wilted; several had black marks staining them, marks that looked like mould, creeping up the flowers.
‘They kill the plants too’ Nina mumbled sadly. ‘They will kill everything in the end’ she told him, ‘even us.’
‘What do you want to do?’ Gerald asked her.
‘Nothing’ Nina replied. ‘Nothing at all, but act as if everything is normal, and continue on with life as best we can…for as long as we can…… It’s what she would have wanted.’

‘Where are we going?’ Cynthia hissed, following closely behind Emma.
‘We have to get out of here’ Emma replied, moving around the supply wagons at the edge of the camp.
They had managed to get as far away from the main huddle as they could. Now Emma knelt in a narrow gap between two wagons, holding onto the large wheel beside her for support.
‘I don’t know if this is a good idea’ Cynthia worried. ‘What if they catch us? What if they kill us?’
Emma turned to her, still holding the frightened Polly close to her.
‘If we stay’ she whispered, ‘we are sure to be killed. I don’t know what they want with us. I don’t know why they guard us like they do, but I know it’s bad news.’
Emma leant forwards, holding Cynthia’s face tenderly.
‘The longer we stay, the harder it could be to escape’ she told the girl. ‘We have to leave when we can. No one has caused trouble yet. As soon as our own men start fighting back…’ she broke off. ‘I hate to think of what might happen’ she finished, biting her lip. ‘Now is our best chance. We have to take it.’
Hector who had been listening silently turned away then, seeing something in the distance.
‘I think it’s too late’ he said.
Emma raised her head. Eyes wide in fear at what she was seeing.
A group of her alleys were moving in a group, heading to the edge of the circle that contained them. They were too far away for Emma to reach, but from where she stood, she could see some of the men bearing black marks upon their skin. The sickness. The ones that had slipped the net.
They were going to give their lives to free the others.

‘Listen to me’ Emma spoke hurriedly to the children, tears of fear brimming in her eyes. ‘We *will* get through this. We *will* survive, but we have to be strong.’
‘I'm scared’ Polly sobbed.
‘We have to be strong’ Emma repeated harshly. ‘It’s the only way we can escape.’
They heard shouts coming from afar.
Emma raised her head, eyes wide, to see the first man draw blood before her.
She blinked. Emma watched as the host of men she saw attacked a small group of the enemy soldiers that were guarding them. She saw them fall, saw the blood rain. She instantly held onto the girls, holding her hands over their eyes to they could not see.
Hector however, saw everything. He stared impassive as he watched their own men drew bloodied swords from the corpses of their enemies.
‘Perhaps it will be enough’ he mumbled under his breath, speaking almost as if to himself, like he was in a dream. ‘Maybe…we can defeat them…’
Emma watched him with fear, still kneeling between the wagons. She heard a horn sound. The alarm had been raised, and suddenly, the noise increased.
People shouted orders, screamed in panic, in anger, in defiance. Those that were not afraid to die, those infected by the sickness who had not been noticed yet, fought hardest of all, and as Emma watched from her hiding place, she thought for a moment that they had a chance. But their captors were rallying.
‘We cannot let them escape!’ Emma heard one of the enemy soldiers hollered. ‘Some of them have the sickness. They must be contained!’
‘Come on!’ Emma cried, seizing the chance and making a break for it. ‘We have to go now!’
She ran forwards as fast as she could; pausing only once to glance around her and let the children catch up, still holding Polly in her arms.
All around them people were dying. Blood and death and the sounds of bodies being pierced and cries of pain and despair, it was all she could hear.
‘Just kill them!’ one man shouted. ‘Kill them all! We cannot let them escape!’
One man fell beside her. Emma quickly looked away before she could recognise him, before she saw anymore, before she saw the light in his eyes burn out.
She hugged Polly tightly to her, making for the rocks before them, just beyond an open stretch of land. A place surrounded by trees. A place where they could hide.
‘Quickly!’ she called to the children, never taking her eyes from the spot. ‘We can make it!’
She stumbled to a halt then, faced by a soldier who raised his sword to her.
Emma drew a sharp intake of breath, turning and holding the children to her, shielding them with her body and waiting for the blow which never came.
When she glanced back, she saw that the man had been killed. Attacked from behind by an ally when he was about to strike them. He lay face down now with a knife in his back. The man that had saved them reached for the knife, pulling it back out of the dead man and sparing the terrified huddle the briefest of glances.
There was a sudden explosion from nearby. Emma was buffeted to the side, and when she looked up next, she saw the man that had saved them was gone, along with their chance to escape.

Emma watched in horror as she saw the path before them was blocked. The fires were spreading all around, and already the trees she had been running towards were roaring like a blazing inferno. The thin dry leaves catching the fire quickly and helping it spread.
Emma gave a sob of despair, holding the children to her.
All around she saw their allies slaughtered, the innocent and helpless. That man who tried to attack them did so without a moment's hesitation. Emma was sure that if that man had not been stopped, that they would all be lying dead in the earth, as that man was now.
'Why?' Emma pleaded, hugging Polly to her who had not dared look up the entire time. 'Why is this happening to us?'
As she looked at the death and destruction all around her, she was struck with a wild idea.
'Get down!' she yelled at Polly, putting her down. 'Lie down!'
'What?'
'Play dead' Emma hissed urgently. 'It's the only way we might escape.'
Hector instantly fell over, lying flat on the ground, Cynthia following suit.
'We will get out of this' Emma whispered to Polly, grasping her by the shoulders. '*Trust me*.'
Polly hesitated for only a moment longer, before lying down, near Hector and Cynthia.
'Good children' Emma whispered backing away. 'Good children.'
She gained some distance from them, before lying down herself, and becoming still.
She let out a sigh, and closed her eyes.
For the longest time the four of them listened to the cries of those around, listened to the raging fires, the clash of steel, and heard at last the din began to die down.
But still they did not move from where they lay.

And here they stayed, for a day and a night, until Emma at last deemed it safe to move.

She lifted her head, pushing herself gingerly up and gazing wide eyed all around her.
Seeing Emma move, Polly immediately began to cry. Hector and Cynthia sat up, rubbing their aching bodies as Emma went over to comfort Polly.
'Hush child. We are safe now.'
'They're dead' Hector mumbled, looking all around him at the smoking bodies. Even the ground he had laid on was soaked with blood. 'They're all dead…'
'Don't look' Emma hissed at him, rising and carrying Polly in her arms. 'Just keep your head down. We're getting out of here.'
The two children hurried after as Emma briskly made her way away. Hector tried to keep his eyes to the ground, but the bodies were everywhere, and he could not help himself seeing the dead faces staring back at him.
'They're gone' Emma uttered. 'The men that imprisoned us. They're all gone. It should be safe for us.'
She lowered her head, mumbling comforting words into Polly's ear, before looking up again.
They were nearing the edge of the camp, and were nearly free of the carnage, when a figure stepped out before them.
Emma gasped, stepping back and holding Polly tightly to her. Hector and Cynthia immediately ran behind her, clinging to her skirt in fear.

The figure turned to them. His body was hunched over, bearing unseen injury, and there was a bloody mark upon his forehead, the blood running down his face.
Emma stared at him in shock, recognising him suddenly.
'Charles?'
Charles raised his head slightly, recognition sparking in his eyes.
'…Emma…?' he mumbled. 'I thought you were dead.'
'I thought they had killed all with the sickness' Emma replied in shock.
'Not me' Charles replied. 'Not me…'
'Charles!' Hector ran from behind Emma's skirt and into his arms, hugging him tightly.
Charles reached down and held him in turn.
'I'm so glad you're safe!' Hector cried.
'I am glad too' Charles answered quietly. He looked up at Emma then. 'I'm glad the children are safe' he told her.
'We're getting out of here' Emma said.
'Where?' he asked her. 'Where are we going?'
'The temple' Emma pointed to the hill behind him. 'That's where the angels went. We have to find them.'
Charles glanced back at the temple, which looked small down here from where they stood, before facing Emma again.
'The angels would probably have moved on by now' he said to her. 'Who knows where they are now?'
'We have to try' Emma said defiantly, tears brimming in her eyes. 'Everyone else here is dead. All of our own people…they've even killed the animals.'
'I don't care about the animals' Charles grumbles back as Hector let go of him, stepping away.
'They killed the horses' Emma finished, 'and took the healthy ones away.'
'Don't care.'
'We could have used them!' Emma argued.
Charles turned away.
'We have to go to the temple' Emma said to him again. 'We have to try. We have to find the angels…it's the best chance we have. I don't know where else they might be if not up there.'
'They're gone' Charles repeated. 'If they were there, then they would have stopped this slaughter.'
'And the flower maiden?' Emma asked stubbornly. 'What of her?'
'Gone' Charles said, '…with the angels…'
Emma glared at him silently. She stormed past him, the children following after. Hector's gaze lingered on him as he walked on.
Charles stared at the ground. After a time, he turned and followed the others, up the hill and to the temple.
They reached the top of the hill, and stepped through the open temple doors.
'I told you' Charles droned, though he took no pleasure in being right. 'I told you this place would be empty. It's like I said…' he folded his arms, leaning back against the wall. 'They are not here.'

Emma drifted forwards, staring mournfully at the stained glass depiction of a blue and white flower set high in the wall before her.
‘What do we do?’ she pleaded, speaking to no one in particular. ‘How do we find them now?’ she despaired.
‘I'm hungry’ Cynthia sobbed.
‘Me too’ Hector added.
Emma glanced down at Polly who stood by her side, clutching onto her dress with one tiny hand. Though she said nothing. Emma smiled down at her.
‘There is a town near here’ Charles said to Emma. ‘It’s not far. We’ve no money but…’ he fell silent for a moment. ‘It’s probably the best place to be now. I'm sure we’ll figure something out when we get there.’

In the town nearest the temple, rumours began to spread.
‘Did you hear?’ one person said to another. ‘About the slaughter; the slaughter that happened to the plains? All those innocent people…’
‘I hear it was one side of the church that is responsible’ another man said. ‘But why? Why did they do it?’
Sitting in a café, at a table out on the streets, a woman with pure white hair listened to these rumours spoken, the voices drifting in the air around her. She listened intently.
‘Mama’ said a young girl, sitting at a table nearby. ‘Are we safe here? What is going to happen to us? What is going to happen in the future?’
The woman with white hair looked away, her mind becoming blurry. She did not hear the mother’s reply.
She glanced up then, seeing a figure striding towards her. She put the book down she had been reading, and straightened up.
‘I'm glad you're back at last Night’ she said to the man. ‘I was beginning to worry.’
Night stopped by her table, smiling down at her. ‘There is nothing to worry about’ he said to her.
‘On the contrary…’
Night stared down at her with steely grey eyes, his grey hair tied neatly back now. He looked handsome in the fine clothes he wore now, like a gentleman.
‘Henna’ he said to her, offering his arm.
Henna rose from her seat, leaving the book where it lay and taking his hand. She patted her deep maroon and black dress briefly, before lifting her head. She and Night made their way through the town. It was fairly busy in the streets today, and the roads were crowded. The pair stopped at the edge of the street as horses and carriages trundled past in both directions, waiting for a gap before marching quickly forwards, and slowing again when they where back off the road.
They made their way down one path. Henna bumped into someone as they went.
‘I'm so sorry sir!’
‘It’s alright’ the man bowed. ‘No harm done.’
He replaced his top hat and continued on his way.
Henna faced ahead again, slipping a gloved hand into her own pocket and placing there the thing she had stolen from him.

‘Are we nearly there?’ she asked Night.
‘Yes’ Night replied sombrely as they walked on. ‘We are nearly there.’
A few moments later and they reached the end of the street. They paused again, waiting for a horse and carriage to pass them, before crossing the road and entering the shop on the other side, listening to the clip clop of the horse’s hooves as it trotted away.
The little silver bell above the door tinkled as they entered the shop, and again as they closed the door. The shopkeeper, a small balding man with glasses, looked up upon hearing the bell.
‘Good afternoon’ he spoke seriously. ‘How may I help you?’
Night left Henna’s side, drifting about the shop and looking around him. Henna glanced at him briefly, before addressing the shopkeeper.
‘Good afternoon’ she said in return. ‘My husband and I are entertaining a very important guest tomorrow night. It is imperative that we make a good impression. We seek a favour from her.’
‘I see’ the shopkeeper replied moving around the counter. ‘I certainly can be of some use there. What sort of things were you looking for?’
‘Glasses’ Henna replied. ‘Fine cut wine glasses. And silver cutlery. We lost our own in the process of moving to this town. But we have a fabulous house. It is fine, but modest.’
‘I understand’ the shopkeeper nodded. ‘Right this way.’
He led Henna to the corner of the store, were Night was already waiting.
‘These are our glasses. They are just examples; we have more in the storeroom, as many as you want.’
‘We only want a few’ Henna replied. ‘And the silvers?’
‘By that wall’ the shopkeeper indicated, beneath a painting of a red sky, where men were fishing at a harbour. ‘Is there anything else you need?’
‘Thank you. No’ Henna replied. ‘My husband and I will look around for a moment.’
The shopkeeper nodded again, he retreated, and resumed his spot behind the counter, reading the paper before him.
Henna turned to the man beside her. ‘Well?’ she asked. ‘What do you think?’
Night glanced at her.
‘This one’ he said indicating.
Henna looked to the glass he pointed out.
‘And the silvers?’ she prompted.
‘The ones on the bottom’ Night said turning.
Henna smiled, looking back to the shopkeeper. ‘We’ve decided.’
‘How many do you need?’ the man asked.
‘Six’ Henna replied. ‘Five for ourselves. One for our guest.’
‘Just one guest?’ the shopkeeper inquired, jotting the numbers down in his book.
‘Yes’ Henna beamed at the shopkeeper. ‘She is a very important guest.’
‘I see.’ The shopkeeper glanced back down to his book. ‘And are you buying or renting?’
‘Just renting’ Henna replied. ‘We won’t be staying in town for very long.’
‘Going on a holiday,’ the shopkeeper asked, ‘to somewhere nice?’
‘No’ Henna shook her head. ‘It’s not a holiday, and we don’t know where we will be going.’

Night carried the box through the streets, and back towards the home in which they lived in now.
'I feel hopeful about this' Henna was saying. 'Nevertheless, we have to play this carefully. There is still so much that can go wrong.'
Night nodded in silent agreement.
They reached their home which was built with its front door directly onto the streets, the only small divide being a narrow set of stairs to the door.
Night allowed Henna to go first. She opened the door for him, and he entered the building after her.
'At last. You're finally back.'
Henna lifted her eyes to the figure that had spoken. He hung off the balustrade, standing halfway up the stairs. He had short shaggy white-blonde hair, with three long plates on one side. His skin was tanned and his eyes a misty blue.
'Lael' Henna said. 'Shouldn't you be preparing?'
'Henna, there you are.'
Another figure entered the room as Night went away to unpack the box of cutlery and glasses they had rented for the important meal the next day.
'Neo, there you are.' Henna regarded him. 'Is everything ready?'
'We've readied everything we can for now' he said. 'Igni is in the kitchen at the moment.'
Henna watched Neo closely. He was much older than her, a wise looking figure with a strong build and blonde hair swept back.
'I'll go speak to Igni' Henna said. 'He would want to know that we are back.'
She moved across the small entrance room, her short heels clicking on the dark wooden floor. Through a narrow passage she found the kitchen, pushing the door inwards, she saw the mess that was the kitchen. Igni was busy cooking, pots and pans and knives and dirty dishes were scattered about the place, so clustered that Henna had to step over some things to reach him.
'Excellent' Igni was mumbling to himself, staring through the glass door of the oven. 'It just needs slow cook overnight……and then marinate it…oh' he said straightening suddenly as he noticed Henna. 'You've returned' he said turning to face her. 'Excellent.'
Igni was a tall man, with long black hair and light blue eyes. His skin was pale and his frame slender. Around his neck he wore a shining red stone that twinkled in the false light from above.
'Did all go well?' Igni asked her. 'Did you get everything we need?'
'We did' Henna replied. 'Everything is going well.'
'Excellent' Igni beamed turning back to the oven. 'Most excellent.' He stared through the glass for a moment before speaking again. '…I am hopeful……'

That evening, the five of them sat together before the burning hearth in the living room.
Night sat nearest the fire, staring unfocused into the burning flames. Henna lay on her side upon the sofa, and Neo, Igni and Lael were sitting on the floor before her.
Night spoke.
'Bloodsin. It's the name given when one of their kind betrays a human and turns them into one of their own.'
'What are they?' Henna asked tentatively.

‘Ghouls’ Night breathed.
‘I've never heard of such a thing.’
‘A ghoul’ Night continued, ‘is an evil spirit thought to rob graves and eat dead bodies…or……a person with an unhealthy interest in death.’ He paused for a moment. ‘These ghouls’ he continued, ‘look much like humans do, they can even trick humans into thinking them are like them. But they are different. In their pure form, many can have horns, sharp teeth…claws. They have different variations. But all share the same jet black eyes that give them away. Unless they can hide them.’ He chewed his lip thoughtfully. ‘They need human flesh to survive, and so live amongst them, pretending to be one of them.’
Lael held his knees, curled up on the floor before Henna he watched Night closely as he spoke.
‘The story begins’ Night spoke slowly, ‘with a girl. She was normal in every sense of the word. She went to school, she had a family, she had hopes, dreams and fears…’ he drew a deep breath. ‘She was in love with a boy, who loved her in turn. The two had plans to get married, to share a home and make a life together. But it all went wrong. He was murdered…by ghouls. And shortly after his funeral, the girl…turned into one of *them*.’ Night lifted the metal poker from beside the hearth, stabbing the fire with it. The fire crackled, and the logs burned bright. ‘She was forced to leave her home, and live on the streets in a gang, where many ghouls clung to the night seeking their prey. One of the ghouls within this group was the one that had turned her. She pretended to love him, in order to get close to him, and when she could, she drove a knife through his heart, killing him instantly.’
Henna leant on the arm of the sofa, resting her cheek upon her folded arms. She watched Night, listening closely to his tale.
‘This girl, now a ghoul’ Night went on, ‘left the group and made her way alone in the world, until she was picked up by a family and adopted. They cared for her for many years, until something came.’
Night continued with his story for a long while. The others listening in complete silence. When he had finished, the silence stretched on.
‘Do they really exist?’ Henna asked him, finally speaking up. ‘Are ghouls real?’
‘No’ Night replied sombrely. ‘They are just stories…’
Neo and Igni exchanged a glance, and Lael tilted his head back to the ceiling, where a figure slept in the room above.
‘I hope she gets better’ he lamented. ‘I don’t know what I shall do without her…’

They went to bed shortly after, waking early in the morning. They made preparations for their important guest.

Henna sat on the edge of the bed in her nightdress staring out the window. She did not notice the morning chill as she sat there in her trance. Her mind was far away.
‘Henna’ a voice interrupted her thoughts. It was Igni. ‘Are you going to sit there all day? We’ve things to do.’
‘I'm sorry’ Henna replied glancing back at him. ‘I was just…worrying.’
Igni hesitated then, hand resting on the doorframe. ‘We are all worried’ he told her softly. ‘Come on’ he said. ‘It’s time you left this room.’

Shortly after, Henna was wandering the streets. She had been doing so for several minutes, when she suddenly passed a figure she recognised. She paused, turning back.
'….Emma?'
Emma on hearing her name being spoken, turned back, the children Cynthia, Polly and Hector following closely after her, with Charles by her side. They all stared at her now.
Emma suddenly recognising her let out a sob, moving towards her and falling into her arms.
Henna held her close, held her tightly, cheek resting on her forehead.
'It's alright' she said to Emma who began to cry. 'Everything is alright…'

She returned home immediately, bringing Emma, Charles and the three children with her.
Igni greeted them in the door, staring in shock at the new arrivals.
'They can stay' Henna told him. 'They are one of our own.'
Behind Igni, Lael, Neo and Night appeared, lingering at a distance.
'Our guest is coming early' Night informed her. 'She will be here in minutes. *They* must not be here' he indicated the new comers.'
'What's going on?' Emma whispered nervously.
'Everything is alright' Henna reassured her. 'I promise you, but you must stay here and hide. I will explain everything later.'
'Hide?' Emma repeated, visibly beginning to tremble.
'Do you trust me?' Henna asked her, grasping her by the shoulders firmly.
'Yes' Emma whispered.
'Come with me' Neo spoke up stepping forwards. 'I will show you where you will stay for now. But you must be very quiet. Do you understand?'
Emma nodded silently. Neo dipped his head in approval as Henna closed the front door. Neo led the new arrivals into the next room, whispering instructions to them briefly before backing out of the room and closing the door behind him.
'Everything is fine' he had said to them. 'We have everything under control, but you must stay here for a while…and be quiet. Can you do that?'
They all agreed, saying that they understood, and so Neo left them there to wait.
He had just returned to the entrance hall where the others stood, when there came a knock at the door.
Everybody tensed.
'She is here' Lael hissed.
Henna cast a glance feverishly at the door, hastily emptying her pockets of the coins and watches and jewellery she had stolen earlier that day and hiding them in a set of drawers near the door.
'Are we all ready?' Night asked the room as Henna checked herself in the mirror briefly, her white hair tied up neatly when it was usually left down.
Everyone wore now the new clothes they had bought, especially for the occasion. Their hair was washed and combed, their shoes polished, and Igni's red stone he wore around his neck glistened in the light that shone through one of the high windows in the small entrance hall.
Neo and Igni shared a glance; Lael clenched his fists as Night raised his head, addressing Henna.

‘Open the door’ he said to her. ‘We don’t want to keep her waiting.’
Henna moved to obey, grasping the handle and pulling the door too.
Before her on the steps stood a young woman, of slender frame, with long jet black hair.
‘Hello Nina’ Henna spoke. ‘Please come in.’

‘Where are you going?’ Gerald asked.
‘There is something I must do’ Nina replied, leaning over her bag as she packed the last of what she might need.
‘Who are you seeing?’
‘I don’t know.’
‘When will you be back?’
‘I don’t know.’
Nina straightened again, turning back to Gerald. ‘Are you worried about me?’
He did not answer, only stared at her levelly.
‘There’s no need to worry’ she told him. ‘Everything will be alright.’
‘These people…’ Gerald continued as Nina moved about the room, ‘I don’t trust them, they to too secretive.’
‘Are *we* not secretive?’
‘I have a bad feeling about this’ Gerald told her.
Nina stared at her own reflection in the mirror, before turning back to him.
‘I’ll only be gone a few days’ she told him. ‘There is no need to worry.’
‘There is every need to worry.’
She smiled at him.
‘Look after things while I'm gone’ she said to him, moving across the dark kitchen towards him. ‘You can do that cant you?’
‘Yes Nina’ he whispered back.
She stared at him, before smiling. ‘I am a healer’ she said to him. ‘I still have to do my job.’
‘But you don’t know who you will be caring for this time?’
‘No’ Nina said moving away. ‘All I know is that she is someone of great importance.’
Gerald narrowed his eyes suspiciously.
‘Goodbye then’ Nina said, patting the head of the brown and white wolf dog as she went by.
She paused, lingering in the doorway and staring up at the dark sky above. ‘I will see you next time’ she said.
And she was gone.

‘Welcome’ Night said to her as she stepped into the entrance hall. ‘We are honoured to have you here.’
Nina placed the bag that carried her supplies on the floor beside the door before straightening up again.
‘I have travelled a long way’ she said to the others.
‘Of course’ Night bowed to her. ‘Come with me. Dinner is right this way.’

A moment later, and the six of them were sitting around the modest round table, with the hearth burning beside them. Everything looked exquisite, the cut wine glasses, the gold-edged plates and silver cutlery, and of course the food, which had taken a day and a night to cook and prepare.
Henna glanced to the window beside them, where could be seen the dark sky. It looked like midnight outside, when in fact it was still early in the day. She looked ahead again, considering their guest.
'This is my wife Henna' Night introduced, after Nina had eaten a few mouthfuls and satisfied her initial hunger.
'Please to meet you' Henna nodded on queue.
'And these are our friends' Night went on, indicating each in turn. 'Neo, Igni and Lael. And myself, my name is Night.'
'What strange names you all have' Nina said, placing her fork down upon the table and resting her hands upon her lap, leaning back against her seat. 'Though perhaps it's relevant now, with the turn of events.'
'You mean the darkening sky' Night replied.
'It is a strange thing' Nina said to him. 'A strange thing indeed.'
She too looked out of the window beside them, gazing at the heavy clouds above.
'I wonder now if things shall ever return to the way they were before' Nina said. 'The way they should be.'
'None could know' Night whispered gravely.
Nina turned to him, looking at him directly now. 'You have a patient for me' she enquired. 'Isn't that why I'm here?'
'It is' Night spoke slowly. 'She is upstairs resting. But let us finish our meal first; you have after all come a very long way to be here.'

The others ate only to pass the time, each of them constantly glancing towards Nina as she ate leisurely.
When the meal was over, everything was left on the table where it was, as Night led the way up the narrow stairs and to the floor above.
'She has been resting for a while now' Night said to Nina as she walked behind him, behind *her*, the others trailed slowly after. 'We want you to look at her, and see if you can wake her, and make her better again.'
'I will certainly do what I can' Nina replied in a level tone.
They walked the short distance down the wooden hall and to the room at the end. Night opened the door and stepped it, holding it open for Nina who followed in his footsteps.
Nina entered the small room, staring wide eyed at the figure that lay upon the bed.
The figure on the bed was abnormally tall and skinny; her long straight hair grew to ankle length and was coloured pale green.
Nina approached the figure.
'What is her name?' she asked delicately.
'Ena' Night replied.
'What is she to you?'

Night tilted his head, the others behind him waited in the corridor in silence.
‘She is my sister’ he answered.
‘I see.’
Nina leant over the figure, studying her closely.
‘How long has she been this way?’
‘Just a few days.’
She nodded.
‘I need a moment alone with her’ Nina said.
Night hesitated. The others exchanged uncertain glances. Henna stared at Night worriedly.
‘As you wish’ he said after a time. ‘We will be downstairs.’
He closed the door, leaving Nina and Ena alone together.
‘What are you doing?’ Neo hissed at him. ‘Are you crazy? You can’t trust her alone with Ena.’
‘If she doesn’t wake soon’ Night replied, ‘she’s dead anyway.’

The five of them returned downstairs, Lael pausing at the bottom of the step and gazing back upstairs.
‘What should we do now?’ Neo asked.
Night stopped, standing staring into nothing in the middle of the room.
‘Now?’ he grumbled to them in a low voice. ‘We wait.’
Igni stepped back, bowing his head in silence.
‘I’m going to check on the others’ Henna spoke quietly.
The others watched her in silence as she moved across the room, heading to the door behind which their new arrivals hid.
The others stood there, hovering about the room like spectres.
Lael leant against the balustrade at the bottom of the stairs, sighing heavily and crossing his arms.
‘And now we wait…’ he said.

Henna stepped into the next room. Emma glanced up nervously as the door opened, holding Polly tightly to her. The children Hector and Cynthia either side of her were frightened, and Charles who stood by the window gazing out, was calm.
Emma stared at Henna as she approached, and spoke.
‘Shhh’ Henna soothed in reply. ‘Do not speak my true name.’
‘What is happening?’
Henna smiled.
‘We are trying to heal the earth maiden’ she told her sadly. ‘She is sick.’
Emma’s jaw tightened then, and she hugged Polly tightly to her.
‘What is going to happen to us?’ she begged.
‘Don’t worry’ Henna spoke with surety. ‘We are together now.’

Outside this room, Neo stared at the closed door, through which Henna had gone through.
‘I can’t believe they found us’ he said.
Igni glanced at him, but the others did not speak.

They waited at the bottom of the stairs for what must have been an hour, until Nina appeared. They straightened, hearing the door to Ena's room opening, then footsteps. Nina stood at the top of the steps, staring down as she regarded the others. She descended the stairs.
'How is she?' Lael hastened, as Henna stepped into the room from the next.
Nina reached the bottom step, turning to him.
'She is well' Nina replied. 'She will wake very soon…just give her time.'
Lael opened his mouth as if to ask another question, then closed it again, holding his tongue.
'If all else is well' Nina said to the others, 'then I will take my leave.'
'Of course' Neo said, bowing his head to her and putting his hand on his heart. 'We thank you for travelling this way.'
Nina bowed to him in return, tightening her grasp over the handle of the bag she carried. Night slunk upstairs slowly while the others stayed downstairs with Nina.
'Well…' Nina said to them levelly. 'Goodbye.'
Night walked down the corridor upstairs towards Ena's room, as downstairs, Nina made her way for the door.
She opened the door, stepping out onto the streets with her bag, just as Night sat on the edge of Ena's bed, staring down at her.
'Will you be wanting a carriage?' a gentleman asked the lady.
'Yes please' Nina replied in a hushed voice. 'And make it swift. I have to leave *now*.'
Night stared at Ena, eyes boring into her.
He rose suddenly, wheeling around the striding from the room. He marched forwards, opening the window at the end of the corridor, seeing Nina about to get into the carriage, he climbed upon the sill.
Nina whipped around, hearing the sound of great wings upon the air. She screamed as Night grabbed her, holding her with vicelike grip, and dragging her back to the house.
She called out to the coach driver for help, but Night pushed him back with magic.
Neo held the door of the home open, as Night pulled Nina with him, back inside, the door closing behind them.
Night turned around, throwing Nina to the floor.
'What have you done?!' he howled at her. 'What have you done?!'
Nina pushed herself up, glaring at Night in anger as she lay on the floor.
'I knew there was something wrong about you' she said, 'all of you' she cast her eyes around. 'The moment I saw the sleeping one…I knew something was wrong.'
'What have you done to her?' Night whispered dangerously.
Nina rose to her feet, standing tall.
'All of you' she said, 'who are you all really? What are your true names?'
'I am Jaspin. That is my true name, not Night.'
'I am Reuben.'
'Aski.'
'Gael.'
The door to the next room opened then, and a white haired figure walked in, closely followed by the figures of Emma, the three children and Charles.
'I am Lilith' she said, stopping before Nina.
Nina glanced back at Jaspin, glaring. 'You're not married are you?'

‘No’ Jaspin answered shortly. ‘We are not.’
‘What is happening?’ Emma whispered hesitantly to Lilith, who glanced back at her.
‘Nina is a master healer’ Lilith replied. ‘We used false names, aliases…to lure her here…because Ena is sick. She has been since she fought Freya that day.’
‘The false one’ Gael spoke up.
‘My sister’ Nina hissed through her teeth. ‘You murdered her.’
‘No’ Reuben said. ‘That was Ena’s doing. Though we would have done it ourselves if need be…if we were able…’
‘I don’t understand’ Emma whispered to Lilith. ‘You brought her here to heal Ena. Has she not done so?’
‘No’ Lilith answered quietly back. ‘Ena is awake now yes. I don’t know what Nina has done to her…but she is not the earth maiden anymore…she’s lost her powers.’
Nina glanced to each of their faces in turn, Jaspin, Reuben, Aski, Gael, and finally Lilith.
‘The five angels’ she uttered. ‘I curse you all…’

Chapter Thirty Nine
The Black Garden

Gerald stood at the window of their home, gazing with eyes unfocused up at the dark clouds above, though which the sunlight struggled to reach the earth.
Beside him standing silently, was the unnamed wolf-dog, white and light brown in colour, its nose and face bearing many old scars.
‘Nina’ Gerald spoke to the clouds. ‘I hope you are well and come home soon…’

Nina sat in the chair, her wrists and ankles tied to the arms and legs.
She sat there rigid, staring hard at her own lap and clutching the arms of the chair tightly.
The angels were gathered all around her.
‘You know’ Gael began casually, kneeling before her, ‘Ena is very dear to me. She is supposed to lead us to salvation. But if she is no longer the earth maiden, then she can’t do that….can she?’
As he had been talking, Gael had touched her hand, running his fingers through hers, almost seductively.
‘Hmmmmm’ he sighed. ‘What lovely hands you have.’
‘Here is my proposition’ Jaspin began, standing before her as Gael rose to his feet and drifted off. ‘You. Undo what you have done. Make Ena the way she was before.’
‘That’s not much of a proposition’ Nina spoke bravely. ‘What's the benefit for me in all of this?’

‘You get to live’ Jaspin replied. ‘I know it’s not much.’
‘Hm’ Nina said shortly looking away.
‘If you don’t do for us what we want willingly, then we start breaking fingers.’
Nina glanced down to what Jaspin held in his hand, and saw he had there, a pair of pliers.
Her eyes flickered back up to his. Lilith stood behind him silently.
‘If you do that’ she began carefully, ‘then how will I be able to do what you want me to?’
‘I'm sure you will manage’ Jaspin answered shortly. ‘Needs must want.’
‘And if I make her better?’ Nina asked. ‘Then what?’
‘Then we will continue with our cause’ Jaspin replied.
‘And help aid the ones that caused the death of my beloved sister?’ Nina said. ‘I don’t think so.’
‘Easy Jaspin’ Reuben spoke up suddenly as he made a start towards her. ‘This must be very difficult for her’ he reasoned. ‘Let us give her time to think, *then* we’ll come back and start breaking fingers.’
Beside him Aski smirked in silent amusement.
‘I hope you come to the right decision’ Reuben called back to her as the others trailed out of the room; Gael remained behind to watch over her. ‘We will be back soon. You have hours to decide.’
Gael took his position on the arm of a chair beside her, as the door closed behind him, leaving him alone with the healer.
He smiled at Nina in a friendly fashion. But Nina knew there was no kindness behind the action.

‘Will you really do such a thing to her?’ Lilith asked Jaspin when they were in the next room.
‘Yes’ Jaspin replied levelly. ‘Of course.’
‘And you think that it would do any good?’ Lilith asked.
Jaspin glanced sideways at her.
‘It has better’ he told her. ‘For her sake.’
Sitting on the sofa nearby, Emma hugged the children to her. Charles had chosen to separate himself from all of them, instead standing at the edge of the room and staring out the window.
‘It’s still dark out there’ he mumbled, speaking to himself.
Aski sighed, glancing about the room towards the children.
‘I suppose you're all hungry’ he said to them.
‘Yes’ Emma said hastily. ‘We all are……we haven’t eaten in a long time.’
Aski nodded slowly.
‘We’ll look after you’ he told her. ‘You need not be afraid, you are safest here with us.’
Emma bowed her head to him, then he left the room, heading towards the kitchen to cook a meal for all of them.
Suddenly they heard movement upstairs.
‘Ena is awake’ Lilith whispered, staring up at the ceiling. ‘I’ll go see her.’
Lilith left the room, and Jaspin and Reuben stayed behind with the others. Charles began to cough suddenly; black flecks were left in the handkerchief he held to his mouth.

The others did not fail to notice, though they said nothing. Charles turned sharply away from all of them, looking back out of the window, and trying hard to stop himself from trembling.
The sickness was getting to him, though he tried hard not to show it, with every passing day he grew weaker. He began to feel cold all the time, and his skin was slowly beginning to flake.
He stared out at the small garden beyond the window, seeing the many flowers there, once bright, were now being attacked by what looked like black mould, creeping up the plants and even the trees nearby. Though it wasn't just here the darkness crept, just out of sight, on the outside of the building below the window through which Charles gazed, the brick itself was turning back, the structure of the house slowly weakening.
But no one noticed. Not yet.

Chapter Forty
The Hybrid

Nina sat in her chair with her head bowed. Gael who had watched her was becoming distracted, instead looking away from her and out of the window, staring towards the dark sky with worry. It should have been bright and sunny today, but since Freya's death, the world had not recovered.
Nina glanced towards Gael briefly, seeing his interest in her waning. She looked down at her lap again; drawing a slow breath she closed her eyes.

It was getting dark now. Outside the world was almost pitch black, only by the faintest glow of moonlight that reached through the clouds, was the total darkness kept at bay.
Gerald slept now, true it was still early, but the constant nights even in daytime were making him tired. Now, he was tired all the time, and so he slept, and the house was silent.
Downstairs the nameless wolf-dog rested, curled up on the stone floor of the kitchen and sleeping before the cold hearth with fluffy tail over nose.
The beast slept peacefully, until something touched its mind.
It opened its eyes wide, suddenly wide awake. The hybrid rose to its feet swiftly, body hunched over and tail between legs it whimpered, gums showing in a silent snarl. It cried as it walked in circles again and again, its wagging tail brushing the floor. It stopped suddenly, then turned and ran out of the kitchen, its light paws padding quietly on the floor. It hurried upstairs and to the master bedroom, pulling the handle down with its teeth and opening the door.
It began to howl and screech as if in pain, walking in circles again with body hunched over.
Gerald sat bolt upright in bed, blinking wearily in the darkness. He quickly lit the lamp by his bed, holding it up high before him.
'Hey…' he whispered to the beast. 'What are you doing…what's wrong?'

The dog crawled onto his bed curling its lip back and baring its teeth and gums. But the body was submissive, and it acted as if in pain.
'What is it?' Gerald asked again, narrowing his eyes.
The dog just stared at him, eyes wide and body hunched.
Gerald reached out to touch it, but the beast drew sharply away, leaping to the floor again and beginning to whine, this time staring at the door.
Gerald pushed the sheets back, rising to his feet. He had slept in his cloths, and was ready to go out at a moment's notice. He made his way closer to the door, closer to the wolf, but with every step gained, the creature moved further and further away and never stopped whining.
'What is it?' Gerald spoke harshly. 'You want me to follow you?'
The beast only stared at him, body hunched and whining.
Gerald made after it, walking at a stride. The wolf-dog ran away. Gerald followed it to the front door where it began to hug the floor, doing so as close to the door as possible. As soon as Gerald opened the door, the wolf bolted outside. He paused only to grab his coat from beside the door, before making his way quickly outside.
He followed the creature to the stables where he mounted a horse and followed the hybrid that had since fallen silent. The wolf led the way, running at full pelt with the horse right behind. Gerald was able to see clear enough as he tore across the landscape, the while of the creatures coat was a haze in the dark, but he could see it. And so he followed its trail, urging his horse onwards, never allowing it to rest.
He gritted his teeth as the cold wind stung his eyes.
'Where are you leading me?' he muttered under his breath.

Jaspin moved slowly before her, stepping to the side as he approached cautiously.
'She's been this way for a while' Gael was saying, leaning forwards on his knees as he rested on the arm of the seat. 'I've tried talking to her…tried to wake her…' he shook his head. 'No good.'
All five of the angels loomed around Nina, hovering in the room like strange spectres.
Lilith leant forwards, touching Nina's chin gently and lifting her head up.
'Her eyes are distant' she said. 'It's as if she's dreaming.'
'Well if she's dreaming' Aski said, 'let's wake her.'
'How?'
Jaspin turned his head.
'Fire' he uttered.
The others turned to him.
Jaspin raised his hand, summoning his magic to him. His fingers became wreathed in flame.
'I will wake her from this dream' he purred, moving closer to her.
He reached for her, taking her by the hand, his magic burning into her flesh.
Somewhere far away, a running hybrid collapsed suddenly, yelping in pain as it came skidding to a halt. The man on a horse that had been following passed it, slowing and turning back, but the wolf was itself again. The man turned away, staring off in the direction they had been heading. He knew which town was nearest, and so he continued on. He whistled

sharply, commanding the dog to follow which it did, doing so with the loyalty of any shepard dog.
'What are you doing?' Jaspin spoke harshly to her.
Nina stared back, nursing her burnt hand and holding it to her chest.
'You do not frighten me' she lied, feeling her stomach twinge with nerves. 'Legends and myths you may be but to me you are *nothing*.'
Jaspin smirked at that humourlessly.
'We are more than what the stories make us' he whispered dangerously leaning closer to her. 'We come from heaven itself.'
He straightened slowly, taking a step back.
'Now' he said. 'Make Ena better.'
'Why?' Nina replied calmly. 'Don't you like her the way she is?'
The door opened suddenly, and Ena came dancing in.
'Here you all are' she gleamed. 'Look' she lifted a piece of paper before her. 'I drew a picture. What do you think? Do you like it?'
The angel's glowered at her. Even Lilith's gaze was unfriendly.
'Oh' Ena said suddenly hesitant upon seeing Nina. 'Why is she tied up like that? What are you doing to her?'
'It's alright' Nina beamed sweetly at Ena, 'we were just playing a little game.'
Jaspin shot a glance at Nina, his eyes blazing in anger. He knew she was mocking him.
'I think you should let her go' Ena said, dropping the piece of paper on the floor as she straightened.
She was far taller than anyone else in the room by a considerable height, despite being the youngest; her long ankle-length pale green hair was tied behind her.
'I think you should do as she says' Nina whispered gently. 'You wouldn't want her to see what you would do to me.'
'Let her go' Ena spoke firmly now. 'I am ordering you.'
There was something within the angels that compelled them to obey her, even now, even though she was no longer what she used to be, no longer the earth maiden. Without thinking, Jaspin stepped forwards to untie Nina, the others did not try to stop him or intervene. Nina rose from her chair, massaging her wrists where the ropes had bound here.
She let out a sigh, smiling gratefully. 'It does feel good to be free again.'
'So what happens now?' Gael asked her, leaning forwards on his elbows as he regarded her.
'What happens?' Nina repeated. 'That all depends on you. I am in your power after all.'
'We need to talk about what you were doing earlier' Reuben said to her. 'When we could not wake you…were you using magic?'
Nina pursed her lips, holding her hands folded before her.
'Lilith' Jaspin spoke carefully turning to her, 'why don't you take Ena to the next room and play with her. I'm sure she would love it if you were to draw with her.'
'You would do that with me?' Ena said excitedly, bouncing up and down and clapping her hands. 'Would you really? I would love some company.'
'Of course' Lilith repeated, turning to her with a smile. 'Why don't we all draw together, Emma and Charles and the children?'
Ena squealed in delight, hands quivering excitedly before her.

‘I’ll go get my pencils’ she said rushing off, for the moment completely forgetting about Nina.
Lilith watched her going, sighing unhappily. She shared a glance with Jaspin before moving off to entertain Ena, and keep her distracted from what was really going on.
‘Such a child’ Lilith mumbled under her breath. ‘She’s become such a child.’
Lilith left the room. The ones who remained, Jaspin, Reuben, Aski and Gael, turned back to Nina.
She returned their hostile looks.
‘Now’ Jaspin said. ‘You will comply with us, or we kill you.’
‘You would really kill a defenceless woman?’ Nina asked him calmly.
‘Don’t stall for time’ Jaspin glowered. ‘You will give us what we demand, or you won’t live to return to whatever life you came from.’
‘Don’t you like her the way she is now?’ Nina asked.
‘She is not the earth maiden’ Jaspin said. ‘Not in the state she is now.’ He paused. ‘Change her back, and stop stalling.’
‘Stalling’ Nina replied meekly. ‘Yes…I suppose that is what I'm doing. You see the truth is…help is already on its way.’
‘Help?’ Reuben snapped. ‘What help?’
‘What do you think happened to the army that killed your people?’ Nina began.
‘Don’t listen to her’ Aski hissed angrily. ‘She’s wasting time. I say we get what information we want from her then kill her.’
‘Now that’s not a very fair deal for me’ Nina said turning to him. ‘If death is what will meet me upon giving you this information you seek, then I am less inclined to give it.’
‘I've had enough of this’ Gael sighed wearily. ‘Jaspin. Give me the pliers.’
‘And what will you do?’ Nina said facing him now.
‘I love Ena with all my heart’ Gael answered. ‘I love her, the way she used to be, as her true self……the earth maiden.’
‘You really think this deformed creature will send you to salvation?’ Nina waved her hand
Gael took the pliers Jaspin offered to him, turning back to Nina.
‘Yes’ he said. ‘I know it.’
‘Is this it then?’ Nina said, showing no fear as Gael stepped towards her. ‘It was not enough for you to kill my beloved sister Freya, but you have to kill me too.’
‘Tell us how to make Ena herself again’ Gael glowered at her. ‘Your life is in your own hands.’
Nina narrowed her eyes silently.
‘Tell us’ Gael hastened. ‘Tell us how to make Ena herself again.’
‘I refuse.’
Gael froze where he stood, staring at Ena unblinking.
He dropped the pliers he carried suddenly, turning away and to the draws behind him, pulling an item from one of them.
‘Ena is my life’ he said turning back to her, voice shaking. ‘If I cannot save her, then the next best thing is to punish the one who made her this way.’
Nina lowered her sight, seeing the knife Gael carried in his hand, before her eyes flickered back up to his face.

‘Do it then’ she said. ‘Kill me like you killed my sister.’
Gael hesitated then, sharing a glance with the other angels who had not moved, before looking back at Nina.
‘You are brave’ he said to her. ‘You are not scared like your sister was.’
He took a step towards her, lifting the knife in his hand, reaching for her throat.
Before he could complete the act, something crashed into the room, thrown through the window. Gael and the other angels turned to it, Gael lowering his knife. The silver ball immediately began to hiss, emitting in only a few seconds enough smoke to fill the room.
Nina backed away from the angels.
‘Smoke bomb!’ Reuben called. ‘They’re outside!’
Through the sudden confusion, several more sounds were heard, breaking glass, more hissing, more smoke.
‘They’ve surrounded us!’ Aski called.
So much happened within the next few seconds. Jaspin lunged for Nina, casting out his magic at her, as Gael sliced the air with his blade, but Nina missed them both, leaping back and sinking to the floor as the smoke began to thicken. She used the smoke to conceal herself. At the same time Lilith came stumbling into the room, pulling Ena by her wrist behind her.
‘Jaspin!’ Lilith cried. But it was Reuben who came to her.
He grabbed Ena around the waist, lifting her in his arms as he expelled his wings, his mighty gold feathers unfurled.
Jaspin turned, calling out for Lilith, reaching blindly through the smoke for her. Lilith caught his hand.
‘We have to get out of here!’
‘But what about-?’
‘Forget the healer!’ Lilith called back. ‘We have to go! There are archers surrounding the house!’
Reuben carried Ena upstairs, feeling her long frail arms clinging tightly to him, her face buried in his chest in fear as her long hair swept after them.
Jaspin and Lilith both ran up the stairs after Reuben, each holding the others hand.
‘What of the children?!’ Lilith hollered back down the stairs.
‘I’ll get them!’ Aski answered as Gael ran past him and up the stairs after the others, stumbling in the smoke. Aski called for the others as he searched. ‘Emma! Charles!’
Of the two, only Emma replied.
‘I'm here!’
Aski rounded a corner, seeing Emma and the three children huddled together. He reached down, grabbing Cynthia and Hector and lifting them in his arms while Emma held Polly tightly.
‘Where is Charles?’
‘I don’t know!’ Emma replied.
Aski cast one last desperate glance about him, before turning away.
‘We have to go, upstairs now!’
She ran after him as he went to join the other angels, carrying the children with them.
‘They’ve got the building surrounded’ Reuben said to them as they arrived. ‘There are tens of archers out there…the best chance we’ve got to escape is if we all leave at once.’

‘And what of Ena?’ Aski asked. ‘They’ll know it’s her.’
‘Cover her hair’ Jaspin prompted swiftly, ‘and Lilith, I’ll carry you. It’ll throw them off.’
‘Right’ she nodded.
Reuben opened the window, climbing out he prepared to jump.
‘Are you ready?’ he whispered to Ena.
She nodded silently to him, too afraid to speak as he held her close. Beside him Jaspin opened another window, climbing out and holding Lilith. They prepared to fly.
‘There’s no way for me to escape’ Emma realised, speaking out loud. ‘Please’ she said to Gael holding out Polly. ‘Take her.’
Gael hesitated only for a moment as the others took flight.
‘Come on!’ Aski shouted at him, turning sharply away and carrying the children to safety.
Gael took Polly without another word; the frightened child began to cry. He climbed through the window and took flight, leaving Emma behind in the home to whatever fate would meet her.
Outside, the archers began to fire.
With all the angels travelling at once, most made it out of the town. Ena was safe, carried by Reuben, as was Lilith by Jaspin and Polly by Gael. But several of the archers caught a single target, and Aski fell from the sky, his wings punctured by several arrows. All had missed the major artery that ran through his wing, but one had been close.
He drew his wings tighter to him, stretching them out at the last minute and slowing his fall.
He landed hard, pushing himself gingerly up, the children either side of him moaning in pain at the injuries they had suffered as they fell. But they would live.
Aski raised his head, glancing up at either child, before casting his eyes to the sky again.
He grabbed the children, pulling them tighter to him, tensing his body ready to take off again. But then an archer appeared on the rooftop above him, then another, and several on the ground around him.
Aski’s focus darted all around him like a frightened animal, cornered and trapped before its prey, eyes wide and pleading.
More of the men appeared around him, one of which Aski recognised. It was Samuel, the man that had carried Freya from the temple before she died, and one of her leading holy figures.
‘Well’ Samuel purred slowly, eyes gentle with pleasure and self satisfaction. ‘We’ve caught you. Even capturing one of the angels is a triumph. Only four more to go.’ She smiled cruelly then. ‘You cannot escape now. At this range my archers could kill you in seconds. So. Would you risk certain death in trying to flee, or face whatever fate you suffer? The choice is yours.’
‘How did you find us?’ Aski spoke in a level voice.
Samuel tilted his head back, staring at the world around them. Aski suddenly noticed that the trees which grew sparsely in the town were full of ravens, all utterly silent. All watching *him*.
‘Nina’ Samuel began, ‘Freya’s sister. She can bend the creatures to her will. She knew we were in this town. She used the birds to convey her message, to call for help, as she used that hybrid to alert her husband of the danger. He is on his way now.’
Aski balled his fists, gathering dust and dirt between his fingers. His breathed very slowly, his chest and shoulders rising and falling gradually as his silver wings glistened behind him, streaked with blood from the arrows that protruded from him.

‘Will you submit?’ Samuel grumbled at him. ‘Will you not fight?’
Aski hunched his shoulders, pulling the children tighter to him, head bowed slightly, but he never took his eyes off the man.
‘I will take this as accepting your defeat’ Samuel said.
He gestured to his men. Two of them stepped forwards, each taking the children from him.
‘No!’ Aski cried, reaching for them.
He was stopped instantly when a third man jabbed the butt of his crossbow into the side of his face. Aski’s head snapped to the side, and he looked back at the man the injury immediately beginning to swell and bleed.
‘If it’s the children you are concerned about, you need not worry’ Samuel told Aski as they were led away. ‘They will be far safer with us than they ever could be with you.’
Aski glared at him, wiping the blood from the side of his face with the back of his hand.
He did not break eye contact with Samuel as he was pulled to his feet by the men either side of him.
‘You will pay for what you have done to Freya’ Samuel spoke calmly. ‘You will suffer for her death. First you…and then the others. I will catch them all. I promise you. One at a time. I will catch them all, and I will kill them.’
He waved his hand in the air, addressing the men that held him. ‘Take him away. And bind him in the thickest chains you can.’

At the front of the home, the smoke was clearing. Nina made her way to the front door, falling into it and stumbling down the steps as it opened.
The soldiers turned to her, gazing at her in awe and reverence as she came from the smoking house. Nina coughed to clear her lungs, body hunched over. She noticed the men suddenly, straightening up and standing tall to face them. Seconds later Samuel arrived to see her. He bowed to a knee, head low. The other soldiers around immediately followed suit. They knew who she was, and worshiped her now as they had worshiped Freya before.
Nina stared at the men before her, blinking in surprised. And then she lifted her head, seeing mounted upon a horse, Gerald, watching her with a calm expression, the hybrid panting by his side.
Nina stared at him in shock. And then she smiled, sighing wearily.

The other angels escaped the town, landing on a cliff edge high above the rest of the world.
Reuben landed first, placing Ena carefully down on her feet. She straightened up as the other angels descended around her, the strong wind this high up throwing her long hair back. Jaspin touched the rocky ground, placing Lilith down as he did.
‘Aski!’ Lilith immediately fumbled, as Gael put Polly down on the ground beside him. ‘They’ve got Aski! We have to go back.’
‘We cannot’ Jaspin spoke quickly.
‘What?’ Lilith turned to him. ‘But why?’
‘They are too great in number’ Jaspin grumbled back. ‘We are more likely to lose another if we were to go back.’

‘But we cannot leave him to his fate’ Lilith cried. She turned to the others, glancing at Reuben and Gael. ‘What will they do to him?’ she asked tentatively.
Gael and Reuben exchanged a look. Gael was the one to answer.
‘It is most likely’ he began slowly, ‘that they will kill him……he may even be dead already.’
Lilith stared at him, her eyes were wide.
She knelt down on the ground, the sharp little stones cutting into her legs and knees.
She began to cry quietly into her hands.
Ena immediately went over to comfort her, kneeling beside her and placing an arm around her shoulders. She leant into Lilith, holding her silently with a firm grasp, letting her know that she was there.
‘I understand’ Ena whispered. ‘I'm sorry for what has happened.’
‘What is going on?’ Polly asked, looking up at the male angels standing over her. ‘What has happened? Where are the others?’
‘Aski has fallen’ Reuben answered slowly. ‘Cynthia and Hector with him.’
‘What will happen to them? To Cynthia and Hector? Will they be killed like Aski will be killed?’
‘I don’t know’ Reuben answered.
Polly looked away, back towards the town they had fled, standing mere feet away from the sheer drop.
‘Where are Emma and Charles?’
‘Emma chose to stay because she could not be carried’ Gael said. ‘Charles could not be found. It is possible that he has been killed too.’
‘But Emma…’ Polly said. ‘She chose to stay?’
‘To save you’ Gael finished. ‘It was the right thing to have done.’
Polly bowed her head, falling silent.
‘What do we do now?’ Lilith asked, finding her voice to speak up.
‘We…’ Jaspin began, ‘retreat into the mountains and find a place to stay. We must get away from this town. They will no doubt be hunting the rest of us now. Let’s get a head start.’
Gael took Polly’s hand, leading her away as Reuben followed slowly after him. Lilith rose to her feet again, grasping Ena’s forearm lightly as Jaspin waited for them. She exchanged a glance with Jaspin, who returned his in silence.
Lilith dipped her head, and took a step forwards.
Jaspin, Lilith and Ena followed Reuben, Gael and Polly as they led the way, heading deeper into the mountains, and out of sight.

Aski was led through the town, into one of the homes and down into the cellar. He gazed around in wide eyed fear as the walls closed in on all sides.
‘No!’ he cried, in more terror than anger. ‘Let me go!’
He beat his wings furiously, sending silver feathers scattering everywhere.
One of the men that dragged him, jabbed him hard in his side with the pommel of his sword, shoving him forwards. Aski’s legs trembled, and he fell to a knee.
‘Hide those wings’ the same man ordered him, drawing his blade and holding it to the angel’s throat. ‘Hide them or I shall cut them from you.’

Aski squeezed his eyes tight shut, tears beginning to run down his cheeks. He opened them again, receding his wings into his back.
'There' the man holding the blade said, sheathing his weapon again. 'That's better. You made the right choice' he smiled cruelly.
Aski was hauled to his feet again and shoved forwards down the narrow corridor, down the stairs and further into the dark.
It was cold, and the air felt damp. Aski was taken to a small room that was entirely bare, here he was chained up, held in a standing position with the chains that ran around his wrists running over the great beams above, keeping him upright. The chains were tied mainly around his shoulders and chest, and done so tightly so that he was unable to unfurl his wings. If he did try to do so, he would surely break them.
'Comfortable?' one of the men asked him, before stepping forwards the punching him hard in the gut.
Aski moaned in agony, body tense as the other man smirked, finding his pain and discomfort amusing.
'Don't worry' the other man said giving false reassurance as he stepped forwards. 'We're only just getting started.'
Outside back on ground level in a courtyard behind one of the houses, Nina spoke to the soldiers. Beside her Gerald listened quietly.
'It was a trick' Nina was saying. 'They lured me here to heal the one who murdered my sister……but I knew who she was the moment I saw her. I saw what Freya saw in the last moments of her life. Ena was put into a coma after the fight. I indeed healed her like I said I would…but she is not the same as she was before. She is no longer the earth maiden, she no longer has access to her magic. I have locked the ability and knowledge of who she really is behind walls in her mind. She does not know who she really is, does not remember, and that is the way it will stay.'
'She must be punished' one of the men spoke up. 'She must be punished for what she did to Freya. She is still the same person inside.'
'Indeed she is' Nina replied. 'She will be punished. You can mark my word on that.'
'And…' another soldier asked stepping forward, 'what do we do with the others we found inside?'
Nina raised her head towards the two figures that stood at the corner of the courtyard, guarded on either side by several soldiers.
'What can you tell me about them?'
'They are Ena's people. The young man has the sickness, the young woman does not.'
Nina stared at the figures who watched her in return. Emma's eyes were fearful. Charles' was bored.
'I want…' Nina began. She paused, drawing a steady breath. 'Kill him' she spoke quietly. 'End his suffering but…do it humanely.'
'As you wish' the soldier she addressed bowed. He straightened again, turning to face Charles now who stared at the floor.
The soldier approached him.
'I know what you have been told to do with me' Charles spoke up without a pause. 'I've known long ago this would be my end.'

‘What are you saying?’ Emma voice from beside him.
‘It’s for the best’ Charles replied, facing her.
Emma stared back wide eyed, at first she looked as if she wanted to argue. And then she simply sighed, closing her mouth.
‘I'm sorry’ was all she could say. ‘…I’m sorry…’
‘I’ll make it quick’ the soldier who waited patiently said in a hushed voice. ‘Come on’ he spoke to Charles, moving away.
Charles lingered only for a moment, saying his goodbyes in silent gestures. He turned away, Emma making to reach for him only an instant, before drawing her hand sharply back as if she had been burned.
She watched helplessly as Charles followed the soldier, out of the courtyard, around the corner and out of sight.
She put a hand over her mouth to stop herself from whimpering, tears blinking in her eyes.
‘What will happen to me?’ she voice.
‘We will not hurt you’ the man nearest her said. ‘We will simply guard you.’
‘Like you guarded the others?’ Emma instantly countered. ‘Like you guarded and slaughtered them?’
The man said nothing.
‘Where are the children?’ Emma asked.
The man frowned at her, but did not answer.

‘Are you going to hurt us?’ Cynthia asked, clinging tightly onto Hector as they walked behind the tall soldier through some of the narrow streets.
The soldier paused, turning back to them. Cynthia cowered slightly.
The soldier smiled kindly, raising his hand to remove the helmet that covered his face.
‘Dear children’ he sighed. ‘We would never hurt children.’
‘Your men did’ Hector spoke up bravely. ‘I watched you kill them all.’
‘The sickness’ the tall soldier breathed, ‘we killed only those with the sickness and those who fought back.’
‘No’ Hector whispered shaking his head. ‘No I saw them fall.’
The tall soldier regarded the children.
‘Where are you taking us?’ Cynthia asked. ‘What are you going to do?’
The tall soldier sighed again wearily.
‘We are not all the same’ the tall soldier replied. ‘We are not all bad people. You are going to be cared for her. Do either of you have a home to go to?’
Cynthia shook her head mutely.
‘Both our families are dead’ Hector mumbled. ‘We have no one, we have nothing.’
‘Then we will look after you here.’ The tall soldier turned then, staring down the street. Following his gaze, the children saw a man sitting on a set of stairs a short distance away. He had a bored expression, his demeanour listless.
‘He has recently lost his children to the sickness’ the tall soldier spoke to the children quietly. ‘Go to him. He will look after you.’
Cynthia raised her head slightly, hesitating. Hector took her gently by the hand, leading her forward.

The children approached the man tentatively. He looked up as they approached; staring at them unfocused for a few seconds, before his attention drifted past them and to the tall soldier that had brought them here.
Back in the courtyard, Nina spoke to Emma.
'I'm sorry if we scared you' she said to her. 'I assure you that we mean no harm.'
Emma brushed her tears away, straightening before she spoke.
'I'm sorry for anything bad that might have happened to you' she mumbled unhappily. 'I never wanted any of this.'
'Are you not sided with the angels and their earth maiden?' Nina asked raising an eyebrow.
Emma hesitated, tensing slightly. She suddenly noticed the soldiers all paying keen interest in her now.
'I…' Emma breathed, 'I……' she bowed her head, clenching her teeth.
'We will not harm you' Nina said, 'if you do not harm us.'
'And what of the silver angel?' Emma dared ask.
Nina narrowed her eyes slightly. 'He has and intends to continue to cause me harm' Nina replied flatly. 'He will never be welcome or safe around us. We intend to fight the angels……as they intend to fight us.'

Down in the cellar below ground, Aski was struck again.
He moaned in agony, body hunched, the bruises already becoming clear on his body.
'Do you think it's safe to be around him?' one of the soldiers suddenly asked as he stepped back. 'He shared the company of that other one who suffered the sickness.'
'The sickness' the first soldier hissed in disgust, rubbing his knuckle. 'It could come from anywhere. From air from food from water…from the very roots of the trees or the earth itself. We simply do not know.'
The other soldier turned away silently, watching the angel with a level expression.
'What is the end for this one?' he asked.
'We shall make an example of him.'
Aski raised his head slightly, barely able to see through his eyes which were swelling shut, the flesh around them sore and tender and growing purple.
'Get me a pair of pliers' the first man said to the second. 'Heat them until they are red hot, then bring them to me.'
Aski bowed his head, letting out a sob of grief and fear, praying in his mind that the others at least were safe.

Nina stood in the centre of the courtyard with the town, head tilted back towards the heavens, the clouds passing over the world in silence, as her wolf-dog sat obediently beside her.
Out of the town, hidden within the mountains, the other angels travelled further away.

Chapter Forty One
The Cave

The four angels, Ena and the child Polly journeyed deep into the heart of the mountain, where they found a cave, a great crevasse, through which was a crack in the rock that was safe and dry, keeping the wind out and what little warmth there was in.
The ground was level, and the six in the strange company settled down upon the floor of the cave, falling silent, falling still. Ena lay on her back upon the rocky floor, as comfortable here as she would have been in her own bed. She quickly succumbed to sleep.
'So...' Lilith began in the echoing silence, 'we are safe at the moment……what do we do now?'
Jaspin spoke in the echoing cave.
'I suggest we proceed onwards, and get as far away as we can.'
'To what end?' Lilith asked him sadly.
Jaspin raised his head, casting a forlorn glance over at Ena.
'She has lost her powers' he mumbled under his breath, though his voice rang out clear in the still cave. 'She has lost her worth…and the rest of us….' he trailed off, staring at his own feet. For the longest time he said nothing. 'We have lost' he said. 'Without the earth maiden and her powers…we cannot be led to salvation…..we cannot survive the sickness…and live on in another life.'
He bowed his head, burying his face in his arms to hide his grief.
'What is the earth maiden supposed to do?' Polly spoke up bravely, Reuben who held her close raised his head.
'The earth maiden is everything to us' Gael spoke up, tilting his head at the child. 'She has extraordinary powers. The sickness cannot be cured. It will spread until it consumes the entire world. Only with the earth maiden, can we angels…and any person who believes in her, trusts her and follows her word as we do, can live again in another life. Only those who love her…will be reborn in another world.'
'So…' Polly began tentatively, 'all those people that died…the ones that followed her and were killed by the enemy…they are in a new place now?'
'Yes' Gael answered quietly.
'And that is where we will all go?'
'Yes.'
'And I will live again?' Polly asked hopefully. 'I will live a new life and not be sick anymore?'
Gael dipped his head ever so slightly.
'Yes' he said.
'Our cause was to gather as many people to follow and believe in us as we could, believe in us…believe in the earth maiden. Only then could we save them from nothingness, a final and absolute death. But to many we earthbound angels are sinners, betrayers of god who have no place in heaven or amongst the men and women of this world. Many believe there is no place for us anywhere, and so we are not to be trusted. Many feel suspicion towards Ena too, for she is unusual. But some…' Lilith blinked slowly. 'There are some out there who worship us, revere us…trust us……those are the ones that will be saved. Those are the ones that will live again after the sickness has taken their bodies from this earth. But…' Lilith turned away, looking towards Ena now. 'The way she is…without her powers…' her eyes grew distant. 'She cannot help us anymore.'

‘If you are trying to save people’ Polly asked tentatively, ‘why are there those that wish stop you?’
‘Because the false one believed that we are leading the people to despair’ Reuben spoke up, ‘that we are leading them to death. They believe that there is a cure for the sickness. That is why Freya was the false one, because she did not the truth.’
‘How do *you* know the truth?’ Polly asked, looking up at Reuben.
He smiled gently at her, placing his hand upon his heart.
‘I know it’ he said, ‘in here…..’
‘Faith’ Polly mumbled. ‘Is that what you call it?’
Reuben nodded once.
‘But without the earth maiden’ Gael spoke up, ‘none of that can happen. The people who have died will not reach salvation, and the people who will die will become *nothing*. Without the earth maiden…’ he fell silent, resting his chin upon his knees he hugged to his chest.
‘Without the earth maiden’ Jaspin grumbled, ‘we will all become nothing.’
Lilith turned to him, speaking her thoughts.
‘If we are all to die’ Lilith said to Jaspin, ‘why not give our deaths meaning?’
Jaspin raised his head.
‘Aski is alone’ Lilith furrowed her brow, blinking slowly with a dampened expression. ‘He is separated from us. There are only we five angels left, I cannot willingly leave him to his fate as there are so few of us. If I am to die, I want to die trying to save him. I want him to know…that we have not forgotten him, that we still love him…and that he is not alone.’
Jaspin thought about this, brooding in silence.
‘He is one of us’ Lilith prompted calmly, ‘he would be happy to know that he is not forgotten…we might even save him, and if we don’t…well at least we tried.’ She paused, letting her words sink in. ‘It’s a better fate than crawling away and dying in darkness and in solitude.’
‘Alright’ Jaspin sighed. ‘We will go back for him. But let us rest first, then we will retrace our steps.’
‘And Ena?’ Lilith asked.
‘Will come with us’ Jaspin finished.
‘And Polly?’
‘Will come with us.’
Lilith glanced over at the child, still held in the gentle embrace of Reuben’s.
‘We should get some sleep’ Gael said lying back. ‘If we are indeed to do this, then we must be ready, and that means being rested and full of energy.’
One by one the rest of the company lay down to sleep, lying on the hard stone floor, despite this they fell asleep quickly, so exhausted were they. Even the child Polly was able to sleep, the shock of what had happened was weary on her mind, and so the strange band shared their dreams, and between them all, was Ena.

Chapter Forty Two
Bound in Chains

It was the next morning that the world began to grow cold.
Jaspin opened his eyes, letting out a deep breath that came as a fog before him. He sat up, seeing the others around him rising. Lilith was using her magic to warm the air around her and keep Polly warm as the child clung onto her. It had been a difficult night for Polly. In the chill of the cave that crept in through the rocky walls as they slept, her lips had turned blue and she shivered violently. Only now was she calming, holding onto Lilith as her magic seeped into her body, reaching and warming her chilled bones.
Ena was already wide awake, having risen long before anyone else. She stood at the entrance of the cave facing outwards. Though she wore only a simple dress, her arms and ankles left bare, she seemed not to feel the cold at all.
'It's so bright today' she declared cheerfully. 'It's so cold and beautiful.'
'We are to return then' Lilith enquired, raising her head as she addressed Jaspin. 'We are to return to the town to find Aski, like you said.'
'Yes' Jaspin replied glumly. 'I wouldn't go back on my word
Reuben and Gael rose to their feet, standing side by side, their stomach's growling.
'We are ready to go then?' Jaspin asked, drifting to the mouth of the cave to stand beside Ena. 'We've nothing else to lose after all.'
Ena turned to him, exchanging a glance with the black and white angel, before looking away again.
'Alright' she sighed forlorn. 'I'm sorry I can't be what you want.' Her body sagged a little. 'Let's go back' she said.
'Come on Polly' Lilith spoke tentatively to the girl. 'We're going back to the town.'
'The one we escaped from?' Polly asked nervously. 'Will we see Emma there? And Cynthia and Hector and Charles?'
'We may well see them again' Lilith replied smiling. 'We may well.'
'So what's the plan then?' Reuben asked stepping forward. 'Do we introduce ourselves with our hands in the air in surrender?'
Lilith mused to herself, frowning and scratching her chin in thought.
'We need to know what we're doing' she spoke slowly. 'We need to all be on the same page.'
'So we're finding Aski' Gael spoke up. He crossed his arms. 'Where would they keep him?'
'Underground' Jaspin said, 'where best to keep an angel but far from the sky, below ground where they cannot reach their element?' He paused. 'I've seen this before.'
'So he is underground' Reuben grumbled. 'In a cellar?'
'Yes' Jaspin replied. 'Most likely.'
'How many cellars are there in that town?' Gael asked, unfolding his arms and turning to face the others.
A moment of silence passed.
'There are five large ones' Jaspin spoke up.
'And how would you know that?' Gael asked flatly.

‘I've lived for a long time’ Jaspin replied sombrely. ‘I know many of the towns and cities in this kingdom almost as well as I knew the old home I grew up in.’
‘So he is in one of these five large cellars’ Reuben said. ‘But which one?’
Jaspin frowned, gritting his teeth.
‘There are…’ he mumbled to himself as he thought aloud, ‘there are…’ he narrowed his eyes. ‘The one he is most likely to be in…’ Jaspin bit his lip. Then he straightened, coming out of his trance and turning to face the others. ‘The first place he is most likely to be’ Jaspin stated, ‘is a large manor near the edge of the town’ he said. ‘It’s long since been abandoned. The master ran out of money, it’s been empty for ages. That is where I think they are most likely to be. There are many rooms, a sizable garden, a courtyard at the back with stables…and a cellar beneath the house. A large cellar.’
Reuben made a face, turning to glance at the others.
Gael noticed his look. He sighed, straightening up. ‘Very well’ he said. ‘Let’s go there.’
‘Come on’ Reuben spoke softly to Ena. ‘I shall carry you again.’
‘Shouldn’t we leave her here?’ Lilith suggested. ‘Wouldn’t it be safer?’
‘No’ Ena spoke firmly. ‘I want to come. I don’t want to be left alone…please…’
‘It’s alright’ Reuben comforted. ‘We won’t leave you.’
‘Come on’ Lilith whispered to Polly, taking her by the hand. ‘It’s this way.’
Back in the town, hidden underground in the dark, Aski stood with his arms held above him and chained to the ceiling, blood oozing from his eyes and mouth.
He let out a sob, his breath coming in shudders as he moaned helplessly. He was alone for now. The soldiers had gone. For now. And for that much at least, he was grateful.

‘What did you say?’ one soldier asked the two soldiers that had come from the cellar, one of which still held the bloodied pliers in his hand.
‘We must not go down there again’ came the reply. ‘The rest will sort itself out. He will die.’
‘What do you mean?’
The other soldier from the cellar spoke up.
‘He has the sickness. The signs came on very quickly. We cannot go down there.’
‘I see’ the man that had stayed upstairs said. ‘In that case, bar the doors. Leave him down there to rot.’

‘It’s dark’ Polly said, holding Lilith’s hand as they made their way back down the path. ‘Why is it always dark, is it still early?’
‘No’ Lilith replied quietly. ‘It must be nearly midday. Look at the sun. You can see it through the clouds.’
Polly raised her head, seeing in the skies above them only a haze of light. ‘Is that the sun?’ she asked tentatively.
‘Yes’ Lilith replied. ‘It is.’
Polly bowed her head, looking to the floor again; careful to see where she was going so she would not trip in the dark.
‘How long has it been like this?’ Polly asked Lilith quietly.
Lilith hesitated slightly, glancing briefly at Ena.

‘Since the earth maiden killed Freya’ she replied. ‘But…we don’t know why this has happened……we just do not know.’
‘Hey’ Reuben spoke suddenly in the dark. The others around him paused, looking back. ‘What is that?’
The others turned back as Reuben moved towards one of the rocks.
He reached a hand out, touching one of the rocks nearby, upon which was a strange substance. It was gruesome, black in colour and sticky like tar.
‘I've seen this before’ Reuben said, feeling it between his fingers. ‘It grew upon a building.’
‘Well now it’s reached the mountains’ Jaspin said mournfully, ‘…the sickness. Come on’ he said sharply. ‘Let’s keep moving.’
Reuben put the sticky substance back in its place, upon the rock he found it, before turning his back and moving away, following after the others as they moved slowly along natural winding path, heading out of the mountain and back to the cliff-edge that had welcomed them.
In the town below them, Emma walked across the room in the manor that had become her prison. It was comfortable, and the people were kind to her, but she knew she did not belong here, she knew she was meant to be with the angels, as she believed in their cause as strongly as the others had had already died for them.
‘Will you come back to us?’ she asked the glass, staring through the window at the dark clouds in the world beyond her room. ‘Or have you left us forever?’
The angels reached the cliff edge, spreading their wings and leaping from the mountain. They soared over the open land, through the sky beneath the heavy clouds, and onwards towards the town they had escaped, back into dangers’ clutch to receive whatever fate would give them.
They landed on the edge of the town, the angels quickly withdrawing their wings into their body. Ena straightened, smiling widely as Polly beside them padded forwards.
‘So where is this manor?’ Gael asked.
Jaspin glanced at him before looking ahead again.
‘It’s this way’ he grumbled. ‘Follow me.’
The six of them moved forwards slowly through the streets of the town, the people that moved around them minding their own business walked by without acknowledging them, a few of their eyes lingered on Ena however, before moving on.
‘We should get you a cloak’ Jaspin said back to her. ‘It would keep you out of people’s attention.’
‘Maybe it would look more conspicuous’ Reuben suggested.
Jaspin frowned at this, before looking back at Ena.
‘It would be good to cover your hair’ he said to her. ‘You stand out too much the way you are now.’
Ena bowed her head but said nothing.
‘It’s not far now’ Jaspin breathed. ‘Not far…’
A few moments later, and they stopped. Lilith raised her head, seeing on the other side of the road a large manor. Perhaps in its prime it looked far more luscious, but now it was run down and tired looking, with weeds in the garden and some even growing on the roof and between the stones.

Gael sighed, stepping back and folding his arms. ‘Looks nice’ he droned flatly, beside him Reuben raised an eyebrow.
‘We should get closer’ Lilith suggested.
Jaspin frowned at this. He suddenly noticed a low wall on the opposite end of the street close to the manor. He pointed at it, and the band made their way towards it, crossing the road as they did so.
Weaving through the busy street around horse-drawn carriages and bustling bodies, the strange band of six reached the wall, sitting on the ground behind it and out of sight of the manor.
Reuben smiled at one of the passersby who gave them a strange look.
‘So what's the plan?’ Gael asked in a bored tone.
Jaspin sat on the floor, leaning back against the wall with his head bowed and arms folded.
‘We need to get closer’ he grumbled glancing around. ‘We need to find a way to somehow get into the building…study the building…look for entrances…’ his fell silent as his hand went to cover his mouth, brow furrowed in deep thought.
Lilith straightened slightly, looking tentatively over the top of the wall.
‘Surely this is something I would be useful for.’
‘No’ Jaspin said instantly. ‘They would recognise you instantly. The scars on your face…your hair… they know what you look like. It would be too much of a risk; we would have to rescue you too.’
Lilith pursed her lips, looking back at the street beside them. She craned her head, looking for something in the crowd of people that walked back and forth.
‘You there’ he spoke sharply to an old lady passing nearby.
The hunched figure stopped suddenly, hugging her hooded cloak tighter to her with knarled fingers, body tense and eyes wide with sudden mistrust and suspicion. It was clear at a glance that this was not a wealthy woman.
Lilith reached into the pocket of her dress, bringing out a large shining coin.
‘I will give you this if you let me borrow your cloak.’
‘What?’ the old woman croaked.
‘There is no catch’ Lilith said gently to the woman. ‘I just want to borrow your cloak.’
The old woman narrowed her eyes, glancing towards Lilith’s companions.
Reuben smiled at her silently.
‘Why would you want my cloak?’ the old woman asked, addressing Lilith again.
‘We are shady folk’ Lilith answered simply. ‘Shady but honest. I promise there are no strings attached, no catch. Just your cloak for this coin.’
The old woman’s fingers tightened on her cloak as she hesitated a moment longer before giving in.
‘Very well’ she sighed, extending a hand to receive the coin.
Lilith offered it gratefully, and the old woman took her cloak off.
‘What are you doing?’ Gael hissed to her under his breath as she put the cloak on.
‘Getting closer to the manor’ Lilith answered as if this were obvious. ‘Isn't it obvious?’
Gael sighed wearily, sitting back against the wall as Lilith raised the hood of the cloak over her head, hiding her white hair.
‘Right’ she said speaking with confidence. ‘Here I go.’

‘Be careful’ Gael spoke firmly to her as she moved away from them, stepping around the wall and into the open.
They were all still being given strange looks by passersby as the others waited behind the wall, now with the old lady lingering nearby.
Lilith moved towards the manor, hunching her body over as if she suffered a deformed spine. In a second, with face hidden beneath the hood, she looked like a frail old woman.
Reuben glanced at her from over the top of the world, humming thoughtfully to himself as he watched her.
Lilith stepped closer to the large building, holding the cloak closed beneath her chin so that the breeze did not blow her hood back. She craned her head up at the building, which seemed so tall to her now that she was close to it. She looked ahead again, seeing through the window a man pass by inside one of the rooms, then another. She lingered here for a moment, until she deemed it unsafe. One of the figures inside the room glanced outside towards her, staring for a moment at the figure they assumed was an old woman.
Lilith moved on.
She got as close as she could towards the back of the manor, here there was a large garden, surrounded by tall iron fences. Lilith looked through the bars.
The garden was overgrown and wild, but Lilith saw something here of interest. Resting on the ground was a hole in the bottom of the wall, a small grate with rusted iron bars.
Lilith frowned at this in though. ‘Could it be’ she spoke quietly to herself, ‘that you lead straight to the cellar we seek?’ A sadness clung to her heart then as her spirits dampened. ‘Aski…you're in there aren’t you?’ she said. ‘Please hold on…we are coming.’
She leant forwards, resting her palm against the iron bars that held her back, before withdrawing her hand sharply.
Lilith took a step back, staring at her palm. She saw a sticky tar-like substance like the one Reuben had found in the mountains. It was here too.
Lilith’s hand began to tremble slightly as she stared at it. She clenched her fist, wiping the substance off on her dress, before turning sharply and moving away.
From behind the wall the others watched her.
‘What is she doing?’ Jaspin hissed.
Lilith returned to the front of the manor, where she was in plain sight of the building and all its windows. She paused then, seeming at first to be making her way back to the others, before turning back towards the manor.
The angels watched her linger there for a moment, before she turned away from them, approaching the manor and striding right up to the front door. They watched in tense disbelief as she raised her knuckled, wrapping on the door loudly, then waited.
Lilith lowered her hand, clutching the hooded cloak to her and hunching her body over again, just as the door opened.
Before her stood a sincere looking man. He let the door swing open as he released the handle, arching his eyebrow at the sight of her.
‘Yes?’ he said expectantly at her. ‘Can I help you at all?’
‘Good sir’ Lilith began in a husky voice. ‘I'm sorry to bother you like this, but I must beg a favour from you.’
The soldier immediately crossed his arms, sighing impatiently.

‘I used to live in this house’ Lilith went on. ‘It was my son’s, a many years ago. He has since passed, and my family have fallen on hard times.’
‘I'm sorry to hear that’ the soldier replied flatly. ‘But what does that have to do with me?’
Lilith raised her head slightly, mischief glinting in her eye.
‘I've hidden a very valuable wine in the cellar’ she explained. ‘It would be worth a lot of money if sold, no doubt a wealthy lord would be happy to buy such a fine brew.’
The soldier narrowed his eyes suspiciously.
‘I beg of you’ Lilith continued, ‘let me come into the cellar so that I may find it.’
‘I'm sorry’ the soldier told her, ‘but we are conducting serious business here. Cut your losses and go home.’
Lilith raised her head ever so slightly more, debating in her mind whether to persist or back down.
She chose the latter.
‘Then I'm sorry to have bothered you’ Lilith said, backing away and bowing low to the man as she retreated. ‘Thank you anyway for your time.’
The soldier dipped his head slightly to her, lingering in the doorway as Lilith turned and slunk away. He watched her go, before withdrawing into the room and closing the door.
The instant Lilith heard the door close, she glanced back at the manor, before straightening and rushing back to the wall where the others waited.
‘What are you doing?’ Gael hissed at her as she sat between them.
‘Surveying’ Lilith answered simply.
‘That was very brave of you’ Ena told her.
‘I'm just glad they didn’t catch you’ Polly mumbled.
‘That was very risky what you just did’ Jaspin said in a level voice.
‘Don’t treat me like a child’ Lilith snapped back.
‘Of course’ Reuben smoke up calmly, ‘you do realise you’ve just raised their suspicion.
Lilith glanced at him silently, before looking towards the manor.

Gerald sat in the lounge before the fire, reading a newspaper with his feet up. The soldier returned to the room.
‘Who was that?’ Gerald asked without looking up.
‘No one…I mean….just an old lady.’
‘What did she want?’ Gerald asked turning the page of his paper.
‘She said she used to live here’ the soldier replied. ‘She wanted to go down into the cellar to collect a bottle of wine she owned.’
‘Into the cellar?’ Gerald repeated looking up. ‘Where we are keeping an angel?’
The soldier hesitated.
Gerald glanced around at him.
‘What did this woman look like?’
‘I don’t know’ the soldier answered. ‘She was hooded and cloaked.’
‘You fool’ Gerald spat suddenly, throwing the paper down and rising to his feet. ‘You should have let her in.’
‘But why?’

‘That was one of the angels. Don’t you see? She was trying to get into the cellar!’
‘Ah.’
Gerald grimaced then, his brow twitching in fury.
‘Gather the soldiers’ he ordered. ‘They are here, search the streets for them. We *must* find them.’
‘Yes sir’ the soldier bowed hastily, before turning and marching away.
Gerald let out a heavy sigh, shoulders sagging.
‘Knocking at our very door’ Nina said behind him. ‘Bold. Very bold.’
Gerald turned to her. She was resting on the cushioned windowsill gazing out at the street, her long dark hair falling about her shoulders. The nameless wolf-dog she commanded asleep on the floor by her side.
‘I thought they would flee’ Gerald mumbled uncertainly. ‘Why have they come back?’
‘The silver one’ Nina spoke quietly in reply. ‘The one they call Aski.’ She paused. ‘Have they really come back for him?’ She smirked then, as if this suddenly amused her. ‘How noble of them.’

The soldiers poured out of the manor, tens of them, wearing light armour and carrying weapons at their sides. They split up, travelling outwards from the manor in all directions as they searched the streets, moving further away as they went.
In a tree that grew right beside the manor, well concealed by the thick leaves the angels hid.
‘I told you this was a good idea’ Ena sang happily. ‘See?’ she said pointing to the ground at the soldiers backs. ‘There they go.’
‘Very good’ Gael replied flatly, leaning back against a branch with his arms folded.
‘On the other hand where did Lilith go?’ Reuben questioned, as Ena clung tightly onto Polly so that she would not fall from the tree.
‘She says she has an idea’ Jaspin grumbled from nearby, eyes bored and tone lazy. ‘I wish she had time to tell me what it was.’
‘Don’t worry about her’ Gael said to him. ‘She is more than capable of looking after herself.’
‘Hmm.’
They all tensed suddenly as a figure appeared on the ground beneath the tree right below them.
She stood with her back to the tree, facing outward at the street around.
She was a slender woman, perhaps in her thirties, with red hair tied back, large curled left to hang around her face, her skin smooth and flawless. She dressed well but not overly excessive, and in her hands she clutched and little maroon purse.
The figures in the tree fell utterly silent, staring down at this figure uncertainly, waiting to see what she would do.
The figure looked one way, then the other, then up at the branches of the tree, seeing the figures hiding there as clear as day.
‘What a strange find’ the figure said in amusement.
‘Lilith?!’ Gael said in awe. Jaspin climbed down the branch to get a better look at her. ‘You look like a new person.’

Lilith glanced away briefly, surveying the scene around her, before looking back up at the tree.
'I even fooled you' she grinned.
'How did you get rid of the scars on your face?' Reuben asked her.
'Make up.'
'And that's a wig I assume.'
'Indeed it is.'
'Crafty' Reuben said, raising an eyebrow and scratching his chin. 'But where did you learn such skills?'
'I've lived on the streets for years remember?' she said to them. 'You pick up a few things.'
'I greatly enjoy having a thief and a trickster by our side.'
'This is no time to flirt Gael' Lilith spoke to him sharply.
'What are you going to do?' Reuben asked her.
Lilith glanced around her, checking that none of the figures moving about nearby would notice them. She looked back at them.
'Ena' she said to her. 'Pass me the child.'
Polly tensed suddenly as Ena lowered her in the tree, Lilith reached up to take her, placing her gently on the ground. She took Polly by the hand, smiling up at the others slyly, before walking away with her.
'Where is she going?' Gael asked when she was out of sight.
'She must have found a way into the cellar' Jaspin mused. 'Quickly' he said climbing down himself. 'We must go while we can.'
'Where are we going?' Ena called down at him.
Jaspin landed on the ground lightly before straightening up.
'To the manor' he replied sincerely.
'Are we coming?' Reuben asked, leaning forwards on the branch over him.
'We are all coming' Jaspin said. 'Ena too.'
Ena giggled in excitement, despite the danger. She leapt from the tree, doing so gracefully and landing cat-like on all fours. She stood tall, towering over the other angels as they joined her and Jaspin on the ground.
'I don't think you need your cloak anymore' Jaspin said to her, noticing this.
Without hesitation, Ena threw it aside. 'There' she beamed happily. 'Is that better?'
Jaspin sighed wearily at her. 'Yes' he said. 'Now let's go.'

Lilith walked down the street holding Polly's hand, head held high and walking proudly. Anyone who glanced their way would think nothing of the supposed mother and child as they went about their business. But they both had a sinister matter to attend to.
'Now Polly' Lilith began in a hushed tone as they moved down the street, alongside the manor that was their target. 'There is something I want you to do for me.'
The child glanced timidly up at Lilith, but Lilith only smiled confidently back.
'You must do this' Lilith told her. 'It's very important.'
'Alright' Polly uttered shyly. 'What do you want me to do?'
The two slowed to a stop then. Lilith glanced through the bars beside them, into the garden and towards the small grate by the floor.

‘You see that there?’ Lilith asked, still holding Polly’s hand.
Polly glanced around. ‘Yes?’
‘I want you to climb into there, and see what you can find.’
‘Climb?’
‘I believe Aski may be in there.’ Lilith looked down at the child, Polly’s eyes large and fearful. ‘Aski may be in there’ she said again. ‘He may be hurt…in pain……you have to find a way to get in there, see the manor from the inside.’
‘But what if I'm caught?’ Polly stuttered, her palms growing sweaty. ‘And how will I fit thorough the bars?’
Lilith stepped back, glancing one way down the street, then the other. She faced the bars again.
‘I will be right behind you.’
Lilith reached a hand forward, touching two of the bars with her first and little finger.
The metal began to warp, bending in opposite directions and creating a space between large enough to pass through.
‘Go on’ Lilith encouraged, letting go of the child’s hand. ‘After you.’
She ignored the strange glances a passing couple gave them as Polly climbed into the garden, Lilith clambering after.
‘We have to be quick’ Lilith whispered to the girl as they skipped lightly across the grounds and towards the grate.
Polly knelt down before the grate. Lilith touched the bars with her first and little finger, and like before parted the metal as if it were nothing.
Polly leant forwards, peering through the gap to the floor inside.
‘It’s too high’ Polly whispered. ‘I need some help getting down.’
‘Hold my hand’ Lilith said, and Polly grasped her tightly.
Held firmly by the angel’s grasp, Polly crawled backwards; Lilith reaching forwards lowered her as far as she could.
‘Is is safe to drop?’ Lilith whispered loudly.
‘I think so.’
‘I'm going to let you go. Are you ready?’
Polly raised her head, nodding silently. Lilith reached down a little further, frowning and squinting with the effort. She held onto Polly for a little longer, before slowly releasing her.
Polly fell from her grasp and landed on the floor. Lilith straightened instantly.
‘Are you alright?’ she spoke loudly gazing down.
‘Yes’ Polly answered, standing tall again. ‘I'm fine.’
Resting on her front, Lilith peered through the grate. Beneath her Polly stood on a set of stairs, gently turning one way as it descended deeper beneath the house. Lilith glanced first one way, then the other. It appeared to be deserted.
‘Can you hear anything?’ Lilith asked her quietly.
‘No’ Polly replied. ‘I think I am alone here.’
‘I hope not’ Lilith said back to her. ‘We are hoping to find Aski remember?’
Polly nodded.
Lilith withdrew from the gap between the bars, turning her body around and entering the cellar legs fist. She touched the steps, straightening up and brushing down her dress.

‘Come on’ she whispered to Polly, taking her first steps down the stairs and deeper into the cellar. ‘Let’s go.’

Jaspin marched right up the steps leading towards the manor, reaching his hand out to touch the door.
He grasped the handle, pausing for only a moment, before opening the door and stepping in. The others formed a circle behind him as he entered the first room.
‘Split up’ Jaspin ordered casting his hand out.
‘Who are you looking for?’ Reuben asked him curiously turning to him. ‘Is it Aski, or Nina?’
The muscles in Jaspin’s cheek twitched in annoyance as he glared back at Reuben.
‘Both’ he hissed. ‘Now find them.’
‘Dangerous to split up.’
‘Now is our chance while the soldiers are outside looking for us’ Jaspin snapped back at Reuben.
Reuben rocked on his hip, cocking his head to the side.
‘Alright’ he declared. ‘Let’s split.’
Jaspin marched forwards as Gael and Reuben branched off into separate rooms while Ena danced upstairs, closing the front door behind her with a giggle as she went.
‘This is fun!’
She skipped upstairs, twirling as she went, her long green hair swaying around her. Ena picked a door at random and opened it. Inside was Nina, staring in shock at the sudden intrusion of such a person.
‘You!’ she exclaimed as Ena stood there, letting the door of the study swing open slowly.
The wolf-dog lying by Nina’s side rose to its feet, a deep growl rising from its throat.
Downstairs Jaspin had found Gerald, who leant back in his seat surveying the angel with his hands folded.
‘I had no idea you would be so bold’ Gerald told him.
‘Where is Aski?’ he growled.
Gerald smirked at him, amused by his anger.
‘He is in the cellar’ Gerald replied. ‘But I'm afraid…he is not much use to you the way he is now.’
‘What are you talking about?’ Jaspin snapped.
Gerald smirked.
Upstairs the wolf-dog ran towards Ena. Ena tensed, thinking the beast would lunge at her, but instead it ran past her, bolting down the corridor and down the stairs, straight into the room where Gerald faced the black and white angel.
Jaspin turned just in time to see the beast lunge at him, but was too late to push it away as it barrelled into him, jaws snapping, its sharp teeth cut Jaspin’s hands as it made to reach his throat. Jaspin’s injuries seeped blood as he got a hold of the creature, summoning forth his magic and killing it on the spot as its heart turned to fire in its very chest.
The poor creature howled and screamed in agony, falling back. It was dead in seconds.
Jaspin rounded on Gerald again, who held a pistol out at him, its barrel aimed at his head.
Jaspin grimaced, resting on a knee on the ground before Gerald, his hands bleeding profusely.

‘You are more human than you would like to think’ Gerald spoke quietly to him, though Jaspin heard every word loud and clear.
‘Aski!’ Jaspin hollered. ‘What have you done with Aski?!’

It was Lilith to see him first, walking through the gloom. He was in one of the small rooms off the main corridor, a figure chained in a standing position.
Her eyes widened and her heart stopped at the sight of him, hand quickly going to cover Polly’s eyes so that she could not see.
‘What have they done to you…?’ Lilith uttered, tears streaming down her cheeks as she held Polly tightly.
Aski whimpered, turning his head in her direction.

Chapter Forty Three
Frozen Skies

Lilith continued to hold her hand tightly over Polly’s eyes, her whole body beginning to tremble.
She pulled the child back then, pushing her firmly out into the corridor.
‘Go back the way we came’ Lilith told her firmly. ‘Wait by the grate. Do it now.’
The urgency in Lilith’s voice caused her not to hesitate. Polly obeyed immediately, scampering away.
Lilith turned back to Aski, stepping forwards.
He had been tortured. His eyes and tongue had been cut out. Blood had run from his face, having now dried and cracked on his skin. But that wasn’t all. Aski was already dying. He suffered from the sickness, this much at a glance was clear. He was incredibly pale, and his skin in places was flaking away.
‘Aski…’ Lilith uttered, ‘…oh Aski.’
Lilith stepped forwards, embracing him tightly. Aski let out a sob, turning his head towards her, his breath coming in shudders.
‘I'm so sorry’ Lilith whispered through her tears. ‘I'm sorry this has happened to you…I'm so sorry….I’m so sorry…..we were too late…’
She stepped back then so that she could see his face clearly.
The muscles around Aski’s eyes twitched, and he smiled at her.
Lilith let out a humourless laugh at this, unable to stop herself from smiling in turn.
‘You didn’t think we would come back for you?’
Aski shook his head.
‘You thought we would abandon you?’

Aski paused, before nodding once.
‘We are all here’ Lilith breathed, ‘even Ena.’
Aski tensed slightly, raising his head a little.
‘I'm sorry’ Lilith whispered, her voice barely audible. ‘None of this was supposed to happen. Everything’s gone wrong…’
Aski hung his head, breathing a heavy sigh.
Lilith stepped back, moving towards the wall where the chain was tied in a knot. Lilith unbound him, and Aski fell to his knees. Lilith went over to him, grasping him firmly by the shoulders.
‘Come on’ Lilith ushered him. ‘We have to go.’
He grabbed her wrist as she made to rise, pulling her gently back down.
‘You don’t want to leave here?’ Lilith asked in wonder.
Aski tried to speak, but the words came out as only noise. He gritted his teeth, tears mixed with blood running down his cheek.
He reached for her, Lilith tensing slightly as he ran his hands down her body. His hand came to her boot, where he pulled from it a long knife that he knew she carried there.
He took it from its holder, doing so gently and handed it her, clasping her hand around the hilt.
‘I can’!’ Lilith said becoming distraught now. ‘Not one of our own….’
Unable to speak Aski only held her tighter, turning the knife so that the sharp blade pointed his way.
‘Aski. Please don’t make me do this.’
He gripped her tighter again, before letting his hold loosen.
Lilith clutched the blade, letting her tears fall freely as she raised the knife.
‘I'm sorry for this’ she whispered, not trusting her voice to speak. ‘I'm sorry…’
He only smiled at her, a weak gesture that showed her that he was ready.
‘Goodbye Aski.’
She plunged the knife deep into his throat, pushing him back against the wall as the blood ran from the wound.
He held onto her hand as his life slowly ebbed away, his arms falling as he slumped to the side.

Upstairs in the manor the other angels immediately sensed the change.
Jaspin stared at Gerald in horror, and Reuben and Gael stood in the conservatory now, gazing up at the sky as the rain turned to snow and the windows began to crackle with the creeping frost.
Reuben let out a breath which formed as fog before him, as it began to turn quickly colder.
‘What is happening…?’
‘Aski’ Gael breathed, moving away from the window, ‘…he is dead.’

Chapter Forty Four
Gala

Three months later

The frost was thick on the ground, even at midday, though it still looked light night. The clouds thick above the world held back the beauty of the sun, having never gone away since the day that Freya had been killed by the earth maiden. Even after this time and the world had only grown colder, harsher and more hostile.

In the garden, lying on her front completely still was a woman. She was not dead, merely sleeping, completely unfazed by the icy chill that crept onto her skin and into her bones.
Before her was a headstone. It had been left blank.
A figure approached the woman from behind.
'Lilith.'
She opened her eyes, pushing herself back into a sitting position.
'Jaspin' she whispered back to him without turning.
Jaspin clenched his fists, his hands were heavily scarred from the bites he had received by the wolf-dog, though the wounds had healed, the marks would always remain.
'You should come back inside' he spoke softly to her. 'The others are worried about you.'
Lilith did not reply. She only stared at the headstone with eyes half open and distant.
'…Lilith?'
'It's not fair' Lilith mumbled. 'It's not fair…. Why did he have to suffer so?' She stared at the headstone, falling silent.
'He is at peace now' Jaspin answered. 'He is in the place the rest of us would go when our time comes.'
'Is he?' Lilith asked. 'With the earth maiden no longer being what she was?'
She hung her head, fighting back tears.
'It's not fair' she whispered, not trusting her own voice. 'Even the angels aren't free from the sickness…….what a cruel world we live in.'
He approached her, placing a hand gently upon her shoulder.
'Come on' he spoke tentatively. 'Come back inside where it's warmer.'
She let him take her hand, pulling her gently to her feet.
'Let's go' Jaspin said putting am arm around her. 'The others are waiting for you back in the manor.'
They made their way back down the garden, the soldiers that guarded them following them at all times, watched over them as the angels trailed down the path. Almost all of the soldiers had bows and arrows at the ready, just in case the angels would try to flee.
They reached the door at the back of the manor and entered into one of the smaller lounges. Here they found the other angels and Ena who smiled at the sight of them, and Nina and Gerald also, who waited for their return.

‘There you are’ Nina said to Jaspin with arms folded. ‘You found her I see.’
Jaspin led Lilith to one of the seats, allowing her to sit down, before turning and speaking to Nina.
‘Yes’ he said. ‘I found her. And I’ve returned.’
Nina dipped her head ever so slightly.
‘How long are you planning to keep us here?’ Gael asked Nina, glancing around at her as Ena beside him playing with one of the cushions like it was a toy.
Nina rose to a stand, brushing her long black hair back.
‘I will keep you here for as long as it pleases me’ she replied.
‘Do you plan to kill us?’ Reuben asked.
‘No’ she said. ‘Not yet anyway.’
‘Does our presence please you?’ Reuben asked her.
‘Nothing about you pleases me.’
‘Then why keep us alive?’ Reuben questioned.
Nina paused thoughtfully at this. She required a moment before answering.
‘You being here’ Nina spoke slowly, ‘and sharing my meals under this roof…is an act of mercy.’
‘So are you keeping us as pets or trophies?’
Nina’s eyes slid away from Reuben, and towards Ena, a girl just fifteen years of age. Standing tall she nearly reached the ceiling, despite her youth, and she was skinny and frail looking, with pale skin and sunken eyes and green hair that reached her ankles.
‘I am not my sister’ Nina whispered. ‘Freya would have killed all of you but…’
Ena stopped playing with the cushion, glancing up to meet her gaze.
‘I cannot kill her’ Nina finished. ‘She is just a child…’

That night as it began to grow late and the world outside became nothing but darkness. The angels went to their rooms, all except for Gael, who lingered in the dark corridor listening to Nina and Gerald speak
‘It’s been months now’ Gerald spoke in a hushed voice to Nina. ‘The angels are right to ask. How long are you planning to keep them here?’
‘Until I decide what to do with them.’
‘And how long will that take? Freya would have killed them all the first chance she got.’
There was a moments silence; Gael tilted his head slightly, listening hard.
‘I am not my sister’ Nina whispered.
Gael could not see the pair, but he could hear the anger in her voice.
‘Then what is holding you back?’
Gael heard the movement of clothes, footsteps moving across the room, towards the window.
‘That day’ Nina began, ‘when the silver angel was killed…that is the day the snow began to fall, and the skies turned to ice. I am afraid to kill the other angels for fear of what might happen…I don’t understand…but the world turned cold the moment the silver angel died. Why? Could it really be a coincidence? Dare I risk to hurt the others?’ she fell silent then, and for a moment Gael could only hear the crackle of the fire in the hearth. The next she

spoke, Gael could hear the hurt in her voice. 'Freya would have known what to do' she said. 'But I am afraid.' She paused. 'I don't know what to do' she mumbled, 'and so I keep them here, in a hope that some answer will provide itself.'
There was more movement, as Gerald moved closer to Nina.
'The soldiers' he spoke in a hushed voice, 'are beginning to doubt you. They compare you to Freya…I hear their whispers. They say…you are not as strong as she was.'
Another pause.
'What do you suggest I do?' Nina asked.
'*Something*' Gerald replied. 'Either kill them…or let them go. Just don't keep them here, they make the soldiers uneasy.'
'Alright' Nina breathed. 'In the morning…I will make a decision.'
Gael moved away from the doorway, creeping silently down the corridor and back up the stairs.
It was silent in the house now; over the months their captors had dropped their guard a little. The angels had never tried to escape, had never caused any trouble, and so in turn the soldiers caused *them* little trouble, and each left the other alone for the most part. But the house was still guarded. Gael made his way carefully back up to his room.
When he reached the top step, he saw a silhouette in the dark, whipping around to face it, the figure spoke.
'Gael. What are you doing?'
'Lilith' he answered relaxing. 'What are you doing awake?'
'I was going to ask the same of you.'
Gael hesitated then. He turned away.
'In the morning, Nina will make a decision on what to do with us. One way or the other, tomorrow…we will either be killed…or set free.'
Lilith did not respond to this. It was as if it didn't bother her in the slightest, almost as if she had expected it even.
'It is about time' she said. 'I've grown tired of living anyway.'
'You're really giving up?'
Lilith raised her head.
'What about the others?' Gael asked.
'We've lost Gael' Lilith said to him. 'Ena is no longer the way she used to be, Aski is dead, and the other angels are dead…' she trailed off. 'There is only us now, and we have no purpose.'
'But the sickness…' Gael breathed.
'Will continue to spread' Lilith finished. 'And there is nothing we can do about it. Ena…promised to save the souls of the people after they had died…to save *us* and take us to another place after death. But she cannot do that anymore.'
'So what will you do?'
'Wait' Lilith answered simply, 'for whatever fate will give me.'
'Even if it means death?'
'I almost find it preferable' Lilith finished. 'At least the pain will be over.'
Gael turned away, stepping lightly as he moved down the corridor.
'Well I will not share such a fate. I will not let my future be decided by others.'

‘Where are you going?’
Gael paused, opening the door to the bedroom in which Ena slept. He gazed in.
‘She looks so peaceful’ he mumbled. ‘I want to help her.’
Lilith did not answer. The two angels stood side by side, staring into the room at the sleeping figure.
‘I am leaving’ Gael spoke suddenly.
Lilith turned to face him.
‘I cannot stay here and die with the rest of you.’
‘You're abandoning us?’
Gael held his tongue.
‘If they kill us, they kill Ena too. Are you really going to leave her behind? She loves you!’
‘I…cannot stay.’
He closed the door to Ena’s room quietly, turning and walking away down the corridor. He made his way to one of the windows, opening it and letting the bitterly cold breeze sweep into the corridor.
He began to climb onto the sill.
‘*Judas*!’ Lilith hissed at him, the name like venom on her lips.
Gael turned back to her, hesitating with his hand still on the window ledge.
He retreated, moving back to the corridor.
Lilith took a step back as he descended on her, taking her swiftly by the wrists and kissing her on the lips.
Lilith froze in shock as she felt his touch upon her. Gael’s grip on her relaxed and he stepped away, gazing into her face.
‘I have always loved you’ he told her, lifting his hand to her face. ‘You are beautiful’ he said caressing her tenderly, ‘even with your scars.’
His hand dropped then and he turned around, making for the window again as his feathers unfurled from his back.
Gael paused at the window, kneeling upon the sill and glancing back at Lilith who held her hand over her mouth, cheeks flushed.
She looked back at him, thinking of how magnificent he looked standing there, his tanned skin and misty blue eyes, his short and shaggy white-blonde hair that had three long plates on one side. He looked incredibly handsome as he watched her, his fabulous light blue feathers seemed to glow in the faint light from the street beyond.
She opened her mouth, but Gael was the first to speak.
‘Goodbye’ he uttered, ‘…my love.’
He climbed through the window without another word, leaping into the sky and casting out his wings. Lilith rushed over, grasping the sill with both hands as she watched him fly away without a backwards glance.
‘Gael…’ she whispered. ‘What will you do…?’

The next morning the three remaining angels were assembled downstairs, sitting under Nina’s disapproving stare.
‘Where is Gael?’ she asked simply.

Lilith looked away. Jaspin gave her harsh glance. Lilith felt a knot in her stomach as she realised suddenly he was suspicious of her.
'Gael…' Lilith spoke up, 'does not want to share the same fate as the rest of us. Whatever that might be. He believes that his life is his own to do with what he sees fit.'
'And the rest of you' Nina asked, realising the angels knew what was going to happen to them.
'We are not your enemy' Reuben answered, 'at least not anymore. The earth maiden no longer has her powers, and we have no cause to fight without her.' He paused. 'You got what you wanted. Revenge for your sister's death would be all too easy.'
'And you are content with that?'
The chandelier above them shuddered slightly, and those in the room glanced up to it, but they were not alarmed. They knew it was Ena upstairs, she was playing, something the angels had never seen her do while she was the earth maiden.
'The sickness will claim the world' Reuben continued. 'It will never be stopped, and now…without Ena's power…the people who will die will not be saved. She was to lead them to salvation, to life after death…but without her powers that is not meant to be.'
'I opposed you because I believed you were leading the people to despair' Nina said to him. 'I believe there *is* a cure for the sickness, and that we can all be saved.'
'Well you'd be wrong' Reuben answered, meeting her gaze.
Nina stared back at him, considering his words.
'You really don't care what happens to you?' she asked them.
'No' Reuben answered. 'The sickness will kill us all in the end anyway, and without the earth maiden we cannot be saved. So nothing matters anymore.'
Nina glanced to Jaspin and Lilith to see what they thought of this, but she saw no reaction.
'Very well' Nina sighed. 'I have come to a decision, and I have decided to set you free.'
Jaspin frowned at this, raising his head in genuine surprise.
'Why?'
'The moment Aski died was the moment the cold came' Nina said to him. 'I see no benefit in killing any of you, and I fear for what I might cause if I do……I still don't know why the cold came or if Aski's death made it happen.'
Jaspin bowed his head at this, falling silent.
'You don't seek revenge?' Lilith asked her.
'The concept of revenge holds no meaning for me' Nina replied. 'It will not make me feel better, and it will not bring my sister back. And so I will show you mercy.'

The front door of the manor was opened for them, and slowly the three angels followed by Ena, trailed out and into the street. Lilith spared a glance back at Nina and Gerald. Nina wore no expression, but it was clear that Gerald was unhappy with the decision.
Lilith turned away.
They left the manor, and the door snapped shut behind them. The four of them lingered where they were, ignoring the passersby who went about their day.
'What happened to Emma?' Lilith asked.
'She is to stay with them' Jaspin replied, glancing back at the house.
'And the children?'

Jaspin looked forward again.
‘Cynthia and Hector are being cared for by a man who lost his own children to the sickness’ Jaspin replied, ‘and Polly is being cared for by a young woman who is also dying of the sickness. They are looking after each other it seems until the end…and Polly is happy.’
Lilith bowed her head.
‘So where do we go now?’ Ena spoke up.
‘I know’ Reuben answered. ‘Why don’t we travel to the capital? The New Year is coming soon and I want to see the fireworks, and afterwards we can buy a cake.’
It was a tradition for many, the day after the New Years fireworks to buy an expensive cake as a token of celebration. The cakes that were produced were expensive and of beautiful designs and delicious tastes. They were in themselves masterpieces, and pieces of art.
Jaspin only frowned at him, his bored expression conveying exactly what he thought of the idea.
‘I think we should do it’ Ena voiced. ‘It would be fun, and we don’t exactly have anywhere else to go or families who will miss us.’
‘It’s settled then’ Reuben grinned. ‘The capital it is.’
‘Will we fly?’ Lilith asked.
‘And carry Ena the whole way?’ Reuben scoffed. ‘No. I say we travel in luxury. A carriage will take us the entire journey and our every need will be provided for. Lilith why don’t you steal for us?’
She cast him an anguished look, before her shoulders slumped and she let out a heavy sigh.
‘Fine’ she groaned, walking away. ‘I’ll be back later.’ And she was gone, lost in the crowd.
‘Oh’ Ena said clapping her hands and squealing excitedly. ‘This is going to be so fun!’
Beside her Jaspin huffed, folding his arms and looking away.
‘This is a foolish idea.’

Lilith was gone for a short while, and when she returned, she and the others were able to pay for a carriage to take them out of the town.
They travelled on the open road heading for the capital, leaving the town and all their troubles behind them.
Ena opened the carriage window, leaning out and breathing in the cold morning air. It was still dark outside, as it had been since the day that Freya was killed. The sun was visible only as a glowing haze behind the heavy clouds above them.
‘It’s so beautiful out there’ Ena sighed.
‘You call this beautiful?’ Jaspin asked in a level voice. ‘What is beautiful about it?’
‘The peace and serenity’ Ena replied without a pause. ‘Do you not find it beautiful?’
‘It is beautiful’ Lilith mumbled, opening her own window and letting the cold air sting her face.
Ena reached out of the carriage, stretching forwards as if to try to touch the very clouds themselves. Her long hair fell out of the window, lifting in the breeze as they travelled onwards. She laughed suddenly, throwing her head back.
‘I'm so happy!’ she cried. ‘Everything is so spectacular!’
Even Reuben raised his eyebrow at her, arms folded and frowning at her peculiar behaviour.

‘Ena?’ he asked. ‘Are you feeling alright?’
‘Never better’ she replied not looking away from the world beyond the carriage and she continued to leave forward, tasting the falling snow on her lips.
Reuben sighed, turning away.
‘I wonder where Gael is now’ Lilith mumbled. ‘I hope he is alright…I wonder why he left us.’
‘I wonder this also’ Jaspin grumbled in reply.
‘Do you think he has a family somewhere?’ Lilith wondered aloud. ‘Do you think that is why he left us? To be with them before…’ she trailed off.
Jaspin tilted his head at her, his silver hair falling over his face and his steely eyes boring into her.
‘Have you ever wished for children of your own?’ he asked her.
Lilith tensed slightly, turning from the window to meet his gaze.
‘Once upon a time’ she replied, ‘a long time ago…when I lived another life…’
She turned away quickly after that, staring transfixed out of the window, ignoring the cold wind that swirled around the inside of the carriage.
‘I hope he is safe’ she whispered to herself. ‘I hope that sometime he will return to us.’
‘I don’t think’ Jaspin spoke slowly, ‘that we will see him again.’
Lilith folded her arms, resting on the window sill with her chin on her wrist.
‘I hope…’ she sighed, ‘…that everything works out for the better in the end…’

They travelled for five nights and five days, their journey was comfortable, if not a little boring, and they stopped often along the way for food and rest.
At last at the end of the fifth day they arrived at their destination, Darthmoar, the capital city in their kingdom, a truly magnificent place to behold.
The carriage stopped at the very edge of the city. It was so crowded with people that carriages were not allowed inside the main city itself. Instead people rode on bicycles, or went on foot. The edges of the city were dominated by train stations; the train tracks scarred the earth like great veins in flesh, reaching half-way across the world.
There was a great procession of carriages stopping at the entrance of what was the circle of the main city. At a pair of great silver gates which were always kept open, the carriages would stop, the occupants would climb out as quickly as possible, and their carriage would drive away, allowing the next carriage to follow after and release its own occupants.
Ena was the first to set foot on the light grey paving of the street, moving forwards quickly so that the others behind her might follow, she gazed in awe at what was before her.
Reuben, Lilith and Jaspin stepped out of the carriage, carrying nothing with them but the clothes they wore. Together they spared the briefest moment to gaze in wonder at the city before them. There was a wide road before them heading in a perfectly straight line to a large building many miles away at the very centre of the city. Its heart. A public building of composite where there were several hotels, gardens, a large museum, libraries, aquariums and almost anything one could think they might need, save for permanent living quarters and general shops. The building itself was a very strange design, not square like the rest of the

buildings in the city around it, but curved. From a distance one might have said that it looked like a great seashell, and that its true home was at the bottom of the ocean, not here where so many people thrived.
'Well' Jaspin sighed taking a step forwards as their carriage behind them moved on so that the next could come. 'Let's explore the capital and see what it has to offer us.'
The four strange characters moved forwards down the perfectly straight road, sticking very close together so as not to lose one another. It was very crowded here, and they were forced to walk at a gentle pace. As Jaspin glanced to the side, he saw the Lilith was already making the most of this opportunity, as her hand slipped in and out of several pockets like she was a ghost.
He couldn't help but smile at this, looking ahead again at the strange building before them.
Either side of them on the great road, were several long and narrow fountains curved at the edges. Constantly spewing up water, they went as far as the eye could see, reaching to the very heart of the city itself where the great seashell did lie. Even from this distance Jaspin could see it, though he knew the fountains did not stop there, but continued inside the very building itself.
'This is a wonderful place!' Ena exclaimed, looking all around her excitedly. 'I've never been to such a place before. I'm having the time of my life!'
Reuben glanced at her, giving her a curious look, before breaking into a smile himself.
'She's right' he said. 'Who knows how long we have left on this earth now.' He grabbed Lilith and Jaspin either side of him, hugging them tightly to him. 'Lets us make the most of what we have while we still can. Look' he said tilting his head up to the dark sky above them. 'The people here are not fazed by the clouds. Let us not be either.'
'Alright' Jaspin relented, shoving him away in an affectionate manner as Reuben still hung onto Lilith. 'What should we do?'
'Masquerade' Lilith said. 'Painted faces on parade.' She pointed to the great curved building before them. 'They hold a great celebration there. I know. I've been before, but not for many years.' She glanced back, casting a mischievous smile towards the others. 'I want to be there while they celebrate.'
Reuben glanced down at her, then to Jaspin who folded his arms, then at last to Ena.
'Well?' he said. 'What do you think?'
Ena only clapped her hands excitedly, squealing in delight.
'That settles it then' Reuben smirked, letting go of Lilith. 'To the seashell!'

It took a long time to walk to the building at the heart of the capital, not just because of the distance, but also because of the crowd, as they were forced to move slowly through the mass.
But when they finally reached their destination, they saw that it was worth the effort to get there. The entrance was a single colossal hall, and was designed inside with the same rounded and swirling features as the outside, and the building for the most part was pure white.
Ena was the first out of the group to step into the hall, spreading her arms out wide and stepping forwards as fireworks were released inside the very building itself. Masked figures dressed in skin-tight, brightly coloured clothes danced all around them, some with beaked masks, others with great plumes at the heads. Each different, each unique, but all beautiful.

They hung from the ceiling on great ribbons made of silk, walked on stilts and danced in the fountains themselves amongst the brightly coloured koi that swam around their ankles.
Everyone was happy, everyone was smiling or dancing or drinking or enjoying themselves in some way.
'It's as if nothing is wrong' Jaspin mumbled in awe at this. 'It's as if…everything is normal once again, as if the sickness never existed.'
'It doesn't here' Lilith told him. 'The capital is one of the healthiest places to live and be, with the best medical care, the best food and drink. There is nowhere on earth that is safer.'
Jaspin turned to her, wearing a strange expression.
Lilith smiled at him, extending a hand to him.
'May we dance?' she asked him politely.
Jaspin frowned at her, smirking in amusement before submitting.
'It would be an honour' he said, taking her hand, '…my lady.'
He kissed the back of her hand, bowing to her, as Lilith curtsied in return. They disappeared into the crowd, Lilith holding onto Jaspin's arm, and Jaspin leading her with his hand resting upon hers, like a gentleman. They soon became enveloped in the flurry of dancing bodies, moving along to the music played by the small orchestra clearly visible on the balcony directly above their heads.
Reuben and Ena left alone glanced at each other. Ena smiled, taking Reuben by the arm and pulling him along.
'Come on!' she giggled excitedly dragging him. 'I want to see the rest of the building!'
'Alright' Reuben laughed, stumbling as he struggled to keep up with her. 'I'm coming.'
They quickly disappeared into the crowd, soon becoming lost in the mass of bodies.
Above the crowd, leaning on the rails of one of the many balconies within the place, was a figure hooded and cloaked all in black, wearing a plague-mask upon their face.
The figure reached up, removing the mask to see clearer.
He smiled.

Ena walked hand in hand with Reuben, moving through the large building and to one of the higher floors that were less crowded.
She let go of his hand, drifting towards the seashell-shaped balcony and leaning upon the wall.
'No matter what happens' she sighed as the music drifted around the great hall before her, '…I am glad we came here, no matter what end we might meet.'
'I'm glad you think so' Reuben said coming up behind her.
Together they watched the dancing figures below them, and amongst the crowd, they saw Jaspin and Lilith.
'They look so happy together' Ena sighed. 'Don't they?'
'They do' Reuben nodded. 'Jaspin and Lilith…' Reuben smiled, '…they have something special.'
'Were they once not bound together?' Ena asked. 'Bound together by a magic? He was the sword and she was the shield?'

‘Yes’ Reuben answered. ‘They were.’
‘And what happened?’ Ena asked. ‘They are no longer bound?’
Reuben’s eyes lingered on Ena for a moment, before drifting down to the floor below them. ‘Lilith asked for you to break the spell, and you did.’
‘I did?’ Ena turned to him. ‘I held such magic?’
‘Yes’ Reuben nodded sincerely. ‘I think you still do’ he reached out to touch her forehead. ‘Somewhere….in here.’
He withdrew his hand, and Ena looked away again over the balcony.
‘Why did Lilith no longer want to be bound to Jaspin?’
‘Because she wanted to fight’ Reuben answered. ‘She did not want to be just the shield. She wanted access to her own magic, to fight alongside Jaspin…to be strong.’
Ena clenched her fists, weaving her long fingers together.
‘I want to be strong like Lilith’ Ena sighed. ‘I want that terribly.’
Her eyes grew distant then, slipping out of focus.
Reuben watched her, deciding whether or not to speak, unsure quite of what to say. He bit his tongue, dipping his head slightly.
Behind them there was another balcony that opened out onto the free world, from which the rest of the city could be seen, beneath the dark sky.
‘I want to be the way I was before’ Ena mumbled, the muscles in her cheeks twitching then. ‘I don’t want to be a disappointment to the angels. I want to be strong as I was before…to lead…to wield magic.’
Reuben watched her sadly, suppressing a sigh.
He tensed suddenly, sensing something. Ena sensed it too.
They both turned towards the other balcony, toward the open sky, where they saw a spectacle.
Ena’s breath was caught in her throat, her eyes widened, and the world seemed to slow.
Before them, descending in the air, was an angel. Light blue wings shining in the dark, eyes glowing white with magic.
Ena withdrew uncertainly as the angel came for her. Reuben recognised the figure just as he landed.
‘Gael?!’
Gael landed directly before Ena, his focus on her and her alone. He reached forwards; hands outstretched, and shoved her over the edge of the balcony.

Chapter Forty Five
A Dying World
Interlude

Ena was standing at the edge of the hall, the five angels standing in formation behind her, all tense, fixated on the figures standing on the other side of the hall and facing them.
Ena threw her head back then, laughing out loud as if she found something terribly amusing.
Opposite her Freya narrowed her eyes, baring her teeth in anger.
Ena stepped forward, and Freya did the same.
The two met in the centre of the hall, both moving away from the safety of the figures that would protect them.
Silence rang in the vast hall, as the two maidens regarded each other, maintaining a distance between them. Ena was a head taller than Freya, her skinny frame and sunken eyes made her look sick, made her look weak, almost as if a firm wind could push her aside and break her.
On the other hand, Freya looked strong. About twenty three in age, she was far older than Ena. Her short blonde hair was swept back. The gold bar around her neck and each of her wrists glinted in the beam of sunlight, which shone down upon them through the conical glass tower from above. Around her neck where two metallic snakes intertwined, their tails formed a downwards point like that of a spear.
She looked normal compared to Ena, who some might have believed wasn't even human, who was unnaturally tall with very long limbs, fingers and toes.
Freya untied the black shawl from around her waist, throwing it aside. Her long purple skirt swayed in a light breeze.
She crossed her arms, lifting her chin high and considered her.
Ena smiled widely, tilting her head, allowing her long pale green hair fall over her face.
Behind her, the five angels stared unblinking. The edges of Jaspin's eyes twitched, and Gael balled his fists.
'We meet' Freya began. 'At last.'
'At last' Ena echoed. She hunched her shoulders, giggling into her hands, an action that seemed to greatly irritate Freya.
'There is no backing down' Freya spoke to Ena firmly. 'Today, one of us will die.'
'It will be you' Ena smiled, in a manner that seemed almost to be friendly; as if she was talking to someone she knew well, and had loved for most of her life. But Freya did not react the same.
'I *won't* let you escape' Freya hissed. 'You are all going to die here.'
'Is that right?'
'My soldiers have this temple surrounded' Freya informed Ena casually. 'I will kill *you*. And *they* will your angels.'
At the back of the hall, Jaspin and Lilith shared a glance.
'We are surrounded' Jaspin whispered to her. 'I knew she would do this.'
Lilith stared at Jaspin wide eyed, before turning back to the maidens before them.
'I have brought you here' Freya spoke aloud, addressing all of them. 'I have brought you all here, and here is where you will die!'
Ena giggled again.
Freya flicked her long skirt back, taking a sideways stance to Ena.
Freya walked slowly to the side, her attention sliding away from Ena, who followed her closely with her eyes, never looking away.

Freya suddenly whipped her hand up, shooting a spell without warning towards Ena, who cast her hand up, deflecting the attacking magic in the very last moment, and doing so with a smile upon her face.
Behind Ena the angels tensed suddenly, staring wide eyed, muscles knotted, fists balled. They all let out the breath they had been holding. They continued to watch, waiting for the next thing that would happen. One of them would die, on the agreement that no others would die on their behalf, no others would be harmed.
Freya stopped walking suddenly, turning to face Ena again.
For a moment nothing happened. And then Ena charged for Freya, moving at impossible speeds and swiping at her. Freya threw her head back, leaping away quickly to avoid as the magic slashed through the air, aimed at her throat.
Ena lunged for her, again and again. Freya dodged these next attacks, before retaliating. She cast her hand out, fingers splayed as a bright red light exploded before their eyes.
The angels and the holy men on the other end of the hall all shielded their eyes. When the light faded, they saw that Ena was gone.
For a few seconds they all glanced about in search of her. And then she suddenly appeared, hovering in the air above all of them. Ena giggled again, smiling warmly down at Freya on the ground.
'That was a close one' Ena said.
The muscles in Freya's face twitched, and her eyes burned. She turned to face Ena. A wind picked up around her, lifting her hair and clothes as she began to rise in the air. Her feet left the ground, and she rose, coming to Ena's level before her.
Lilith watched in awe, never having seen such magic before. Her breath was caught in her throat.
There were a series of loud bangs and flashes of light. Ena and Freya moved quickly, doing so so fast that the mind could not process what was happening. There was an almighty crash, and glass and rubble and dust fell from the ceiling.
The maidens appeared on the floor again, charging for each other. There was a stream of blood, but none could see from whom it had come from. Ena threw her hands to the floor then, and the very stone itself warped, forming its shape into a spear point and shooting towards Freya. But Freya turned out of the way just in time, throwing her hands to the side and breaking the stone point that had frozen now, and causing it to crumble into many tiny pieces. Ena vanished again as Freya made to strike her. Freya was suddenly thrown to the wall, held back by Ena's magic as she suddenly appeared before her, holding her there.
Ena smiled. The giant statue of a robed holy man, standing on the pedestal above them moved suddenly. Freya hearing the crack of the rock as the statue moved, looked up suddenly. She had no time to escape as the giant statue plunged the spear downwards, into her shoulder, right through her body and leg and into the floor below.
Freya gasped in shock, mouth opening and closing her mouth like a fish out of water, as Ena bowed her head, stepping back and whispering a short prayer under her breath as she did.
As the figures around them saw what had happened, there was an explosion of noise as the holy men began to shout.
The stone statue jerked the long spear sharply upwards and out of Freya's body. Freya fell to her knees. One of the holy men charged forwards towards them. Ena leapt back as the figure

grabbed Freya before she fell. Ena felt arms wrap around her from behind, recognising Gael's touch as he flew backwards with her, back behind the wall of angels, and back to safety.
The hall erupted into chaos as holy men began to charge forwards, drawing their weapons with the intent of killing the angels, and the angels in turn, fought back as confusion was sown.
Freya was taken away, carried by the holy figure that had been the first to reach her; she disappeared from view as the fighting back. Flashes of light and bangs and screams and blood and cries. Everything moved so fast, only Gael was the one not to fight. As he held Ena in his arms, she suddenly went limp.
He called her name, kneeling as he held her and shaking her by the shoulder.
She had slipped into unconsciousness.
Gael gathered her long hair up hastily, he lifted her in his arms and stretching his wings.
He used a huge portion of his magic to blast a hole in the wall, escaping through it before anyone knew what was going on.
The archers outside tried to fire at him, but they were confused and disorganised as news of Freya's defeat spread like wildfire. With her fallen, they broke formation, and the four angels behind Gael were able to escape moments later unharmed, though some still tries to shoot them down.
The five angels soared over the landscape, led by Gael who carried the unconscious Ena in his arms; they flew away, away from the temple, away from even the people that followed Ena. They would not put them in danger, it was Ena that the enemy wanted, and so they fled to somewhere desolate, somewhere hidden, where Ena could recover. The people, the army that followed her were completely forgotten. Perhaps they would meet them again, at a later time when they were able, when it was safe. It would take the enemy a long time to find the angels, wherever they went. But perhaps they could hide, just long enough for Ena to become strong again.
'Please be alright' Gael whispered to Ena tenderly, holding her close to him as he beat his wings hard, struggling with the effort of carrying the extra weight. 'Please stay with me.'
But Ena was completely unresponsive. Her long pale green hair unravelled and fell free, whipping in the wind and becoming tangled around Gael's wing as he flew.
Around him, the other four angels flew in formation, all alert, keeping a look out, for they were most vulnerable now than they ever had been.

Freya was carried in the arms of the holy man, out of the temple and just beyond the doors.
He dropped to his knee, holding her firmly and gazing into her face.
But it was too late. She was already dead.

The holy man stared at her for ages. Around him the other holy figures began to gather, looming like ghosts over the kneeling man and the maiden.

There was a rumble in the distant land. The holy man raised his head, seeing the sky above them slowly beginning to darken, as the thick black clouds rolled in, blotting out the light from the sun.
The world began to grow dark, but the angels flew on, unperturbed by the sudden change in their world. They cared only about their earth maiden, who was unconscious and unresponsive.
They carried her away, to the nearest town.
The angels found an abandoned home, and claimed it as their own.
'They perished' Lilith mumbled, reaching out to touch a photograph upon the dusty mantelpiece. 'It was the sickness that claimed them…one by one….'
Gael carried Ena's still profile upstairs. The other angels followed, and as she was laid on the bed, the other angels gathered around her, one pulling back the sheets, another fluffing her pillow, while another swept her long hair back so that it was out of the way.
Ena saw all of this; a ghost of her own self watched her own sleeping body as she was laid to rest upon the bed.
The angels lingered for a few moments longer, before leaving her alone, and closing the door behind them.
Ena approached her own body, staring down at it.
It was at this moment, that Ena saw the plague-masked figure.
'I thought that you might appear' her essence said to him, 'especially at a time like this.'
'I have come to tell you' the masked figure said gliding closer to her conscious being, 'that Freya is dead. Killing her was the beginning of the spell that will bring about the end of the world.'
Ena said nothing. She only cocked her head at him.
'I want things to be better' she said at last. 'I want to lead the people of this world to salvation.'
'And you will' the masked figure said. 'But you must die first.'
The figure paused; glancing back at Ena's sleeping profile.
'Everything is falling into place' he said. 'Kyrah, Ena, Zen…lotus…the people will follow you…they'll follow you to the end. But first you must wake up……you must wake.'
The earth maiden's spirit watched as the masked figure glided away, fading from her sight until he was gone.
She looked back at her own body, falling silent.
Here in her bedroom she stayed, watching unseen as the angels tended to her. They tried to make her better, tried to buy medicines for her of all sorts, one of which was a cloth soaked in oils that caused the skin to burn, supposedly forcing the patient to wake. But no matter what the angels tried, they failed, and in the end they decided to begin calling healers to the house, before the earth maiden's body died.
Their last resort was Nina.

'*Judas*!' Lilith hissed at him, the name like venom on her lips.
Gael turned back to her, hesitating with his hand still on the window ledge.
He retreated, moving back to the corridor.
Lilith took a step back as he descended on her, taking her swiftly by the wrists and kissing her on the lips.
Lilith froze in shock as she felt his touch upon her. Gael's grip on her relaxed and he stepped away, gazing into her face.
'I have always loved you' he told her, lifting his hand to her face. 'You are beautiful' he said caressing her tenderly, 'even with your scars.'
His hand dropped then and he turned around, making for the window again as his feathers unfurled from his back.
Gael paused at the window, kneeling upon the sill and glancing back at Lilith who held her hand over her mouth, cheeks flushed.
'Goodbye' he uttered, '…my love.'
He climbed through the window without another word, leaping into the sky and casting out his wings.
Gael felt the cold rush of air between his feathers, the bite of the wind. But it bothered him not, and he was able to navigate the darkness with relative ease, glancing up at the heavy clouds above him.
He beat his wings faster, flying swiftly across the land; he soon left the town far behind him, gliding over the open plains as he headed to the mountains, to the highest point in the world that he knew.
It took him many hours to get there, and he flew as high as he could, until the air became too thin to manage. From here he travelled on foot, clawing his way up the rocky mountainside, until he reached the highest peak.
The storm battled around him, and he called over the wind at the top of his voice.
He knew they were there. He knew one would appear. And he was right.
He had not seen one in a long time, but before him stood a figure hooded and cloaked all in black, the plague mask they wore hiding their face.
The figure raised a figure, beaconing to him, before stepping back off the edge of the pinnacle and falling. Gael watched the figure fall, transforming seconds later into a shining beacon. Gael took a running jump, hurling himself off the mountain and falling like a stone, extending his wings when the air became thicker.
He glided back down to earth, following the glowing orb as they left the storm behind them.
Minutes later, Gael touched the ground gently, straightening and withdrawing his wings back into his body.
The masked figure turned to Gael, and although Gael could not see, was smiling behind the mask.
'You certainly know how to get our attention' the figure spoke in a male voice.
'I don't know who you are' Gael began, 'but I know you are exceptional beings……please' he said placing a hand upon his heart, 'I need your help.'
'You wish to save the earth maiden' the figure spoke in a deep voice. 'You share a strong bond with her…I know.'

‘Please’ Gael said as the figure glided past him, turning to keep him in sight. ‘I *have* to save her…I *have to*…’
The figure stopped his pacing, turning at last to face him.
‘You know what's wrong with her?’
‘No’ Gael replied, glowering now. ‘But I know you do.’
The masked figure stared at him, frozen as a statue. At last he spoke.
‘She has not lost her powers’ he said to Gael. ‘She is still the earth maiden, but her magic is hidden behind a very high wall deep within her subconscious. She does not know what she is capable of. She has no memory of her past without her magic.’
‘What can save her?’ Gael asked. ‘How can I make her the way she was before?’
‘Only one thing can break down the wall’ the masked figure spoke with a smirk now, Gael could hear the amusement in his voice as he said this. ‘Blunt force trauma.’
‘I'm sorry?’
‘Nina used very delicate magic to build the wall, she was meticulous, precise. But it can be destroyed. Ena *will* be the way she was before. It looks hopeless…but there is still hope.’
Gael stared at him.
‘A blow to the head’ the masked figure spoke clearly. ‘I hear it works wonders. Just try not to kill her.’
Gael turned away.
‘Where are they now?’ he mumbled, making the most of the situation before the masked figure left him for good.
‘The angels’ the masked figure spoke, ‘and the earth maiden…are heading to the capital.’ He paused. ‘They are nearly there. They have given up the fight. They now only want to enjoy their life…what little of it they have left...before they die.’
‘I will not give into despair’ Gael breathed. ‘There is always a way.’
‘Then go’ the strange figure whispered. ‘Return to your maiden, and make her whole again.’

Together they watched the dancing figures below them, and amongst the crowd, they saw Jaspin and Lilith.
‘They look so happy together’ Ena sighed. ‘Don’t they?’
‘They do’ Reuben nodded. ‘Jaspin and Lilith…’ Reuben smiled, ‘…they have something special.’
‘Were they once not bound together?’ Ena asked. ‘Bound together by a magic? He was the sword and she was the shield?’
‘Yes’ Reuben answered. ‘They were.’
‘And what happened?’ Ena asked. ‘They are no longer bound?’
Reuben’s eyes lingered on Ena for a moment, before drifting down to the floor below them. ‘Lilith asked for you to break the spell, and you did.’
‘I did?’ Ena turned to him. ‘I held such magic?’
‘Yes’ Reuben nodded sincerely. ‘I think you still do’ he reached out to touch her forehead. ‘Somewhere….in here.’

He withdrew his hand, and Ena looked away again over the balcony.
'Why did Lilith no longer want to be bound to Jaspin?'
'Because she wanted to fight' Reuben answered. 'She did not want to be just the shield. She wanted access to her own magic, to fight alongside Jaspin…to be strong.'
Ena clenched her fists, weaving her long fingers together.
'I want to be strong like Lilith' Ena sighed. 'I want that terribly.'
Her eyes grew distant then, slipping out of focus.
Reuben watched her, deciding whether or not to speak, unsure quite of what to say. He bit his tongue, dipping his head slightly.
Behind them there was another balcony that opened out onto the free world, from which the rest of the city could be seen, beneath the dark sky.
'I want to be the way I was before' Ena mumbled, the muscles in her cheeks twitching then. 'I don't want to be a disappointment to the angels. I want to be strong as I was before…to lead…to wield magic.'
Reuben watched her sadly, suppressing a sigh.
He tensed suddenly, sensing something. Ena sensed it too.
They both turned towards the other balcony, toward the open sky, where they saw a spectacle.
Ena's breath was caught in her throat, her eyes widened, and the world seemed to slow.
Before them, descending in the air, was an angel. Light blue wings shining in the dark, eyes glowing white with magic.
Ena withdrew uncertainly as the angel came for her. Reuben recognised the figure just as he landed.
'Gael?!'
Gael landed directly before Ena, his focus on her and her alone. He reached forwards; hands outstretched, and shoved her over the edge of the balcony.

Chapter Forty Six
The Balcony

Gael was grabbed by Reuben and before he knew what was happening, he was shoved to the ground.
'What have you done?!' Reuben howled at him, punching him in the face again and again.
'What have you done?!'
He stopped suddenly, fist drawn back, an expression of shock and disbelief on his face.
Beneath him Gael stared up at him, his skin bleeding and eye already beginning to swell.
Reuben turned from him, rising to his feet and running over to the balcony.
He stared down, grasping the wall tightly beneath his fingers as behind him, Gael rose gingerly to his feet.
'No…' Reuben whispered in awe. 'It cannot be…'
From the wreckage of the stall directly below him, Ena could be seen. But she was alive, and she was rising to her feet.

All around her the people stared, and the music ceased to play. Among the figures that had been dancing, Jaspin and Lilith watched.
'Ena…?' Lilith uttered.
Ena wobbled on the spot, hunching her body as her hand went to her head.
The peopled around her formed a circle. One or two stepped tentatively towards her, before backing sharply away.
The air around her was vibrating with magic.
From the balcony Reuben gasped, eyes wide and shining as below him, Ena straightened up, the blood still fresh running down the side of her head and to her neck.
'Myself' she breathed as she surveyed the environment around her as if it were the first time. 'I am myself again…'
Jaspin's hand went to his mouth in shock as he watched, body beginning to tremble as beside him, Lilith held onto his arm, unable to look away from Ena.
'Hear me now' Ena spoke loudly, her voice echoing within the vast building as is she was standing in every corner, 'I know many of you realise the world is changing! I know many of you realise this pocket of comfort you hold here is just a farce, and that you cannot hide from what is happening, for it affects us even here!'
'What is she talking about?' Lilith whispered to Jaspin. 'What is she saying?'
'The sickness' Jaspin said narrowing his eyes. '…It is here…'
Ena turned behind her, staring up at the balcony from which she had fallen.
'Gael' she commanded. 'Show yourself!'
Gael approached the balcony, opening his shirt so all could see his chest.
Reuben stepped back sharply at the sight of it. Upon Gael's skin, infecting his flesh, were black marks, like the kind seen before.'
'You have it?!' Reuben breathed in disbelief.
'I'm sorry friend' Gael said turning to him as the people on the ground broke out into whispers as they huddled and talked amongst themselves. 'I had to keep it from you.'
'You've had it for a long time…?'
'Yes' Gael whispered. 'Since…we first met the earth maiden.'
'For that long?' Reuben said in disbelief.
'Yes.'
'So it can kill quickly, or it can kill slowly.'
'The sickness is not something easily understood' Gael told him sadly. 'It comes in many different forms……but all kill in the end. My days are numbered.'
'I know many of you have the sickness' Ena's voice boomed across the hall. 'Even though you try to hide it, I still sense it there…I feel its presence around me!'
The people stared at her in shock and utter disbelief.
'I can save you' Ena said. 'I can save all of you. From oblivion. From nothingness! I can give you life after death! I can give you another chance, so that you may smile again, feel love, feel warmth in a new world after death!'
She stood tall, bowing her head as she began to rise in the air before them.
Many of the people gasped in awe, some shouted witchcraft, but none could tear their eyes away from the spectacle.
Ena closed her eye slowly, drawing a deep breath as her chest began to glow green, and tendrils grew out from her body, producing a slight ringing sound, shining brightly and lighting up and hall so bright, it could be seen from miles away.
The angel's wings were suddenly forced from their bodies, an act that at this point they could not control. Many of the people on the ground around Jaspin and Lilith drew sharply away

from them. But none shouted betrayer, and as their wings began to glow bright with the magic emanating from the earth maiden, some of the people even found them beautiful.
Lilith's wings glowed white, like one of Jaspin's wings, the other shone black like hell itself.
Upon the balcony, Gael stretched his light blue wings outwards as far as he could. Beside him, Reuben did the same, his gold wings shining like the sun.
Ena looked down at the people, her hair lifting in the magic she created.
The tendrils continued to grow around her, reaching far and touching the hearts of every man, woman and child at her feet
'Feel it' Ena whispered, though each heard her clearly. 'It's the spirit of the earth'
She stared at the people below her as they experienced her magic, each person feeling healed of wounds they did not know they had.'
'Alive…' Ena breathed, eyes glowing slightly. 'I am alive…'

Chapter Forty Seven
A Kings Last Wish

The queen strode down the corridor, her pace was quickened. Her heeled shoes clicked on the glassy floor as she went, her own reflection walking with her. The skirt of her red and orange dress was split at the front, the thin and light fabric swept back as she marched on. Beneath her dress she wore skin-tight black trousers, and her black hair was left to hang loosely about her shoulders.
The queen did not slow her pace as she turned off the main corridor, making her way towards a set of double doors at the end of the smaller corridor. The sentries either side of the door opened them as she approached, allowing her to enter without pause.
As she stepped into the room, the doors closed behind her. The queen stopped.
'Out' she barked at the two women within the room, servants and healers.
They swiftly obeyed, hurrying out with heads bowed and slipping quietly through the door behind the queen, closing it after them.
The room inside was modest in size, pentagon in shape, with two large balconies either side looking out over a large garden that was once beautiful.
The queen's attention lingered on the open doors that led to the outside world, the thin curtains lifting in the gentle breeze. The sky beyond, was dark.
She looked to the centre of the room again, where there was a bed on a raised pedestal. Upon the bed, lay a figure.
The queen took a deep breath to calm her nerves, forcing herself to be strong.
She stepped forward.
Ascending the two short steps to the pedestal, the queen approached the bed, leaning over and touching gently the face of the man who lay upon it.
He opened his eyes.
'Grace' the man sighed, smiling widely at her.

‘Husband’ she said.
She bowed her head, allowing her dark hair to fall forwards.
‘I've missed you’ she sighed.
The king shifted slightly where he lay, the edges of his eyes crinkling.
‘Grace’ he said again to her. ‘I want you to carry on my work when I'm gone.’
‘Don’t talk like this.’
‘Listen to me’ he said taking her by the hand. ‘I want you to make this world whole again, to right the wrongs, and bring peace where there is strife.’
‘Are you talking about what's happening in the capital?’
‘I don’t know who this girl is’ the king went on, ‘but you have to stop what she is doing. She is causing unrest among my people.’
The queen raised her head slightly, looking to the dark sky outside.
‘This’ the king sighed as he held his wife’s hand, ‘is my final wish.’
She stared at the rolling clouds, the hazy glow of the sun that struggled to find its way through.
She looked back at her husband, with a gasp drawing her hand back slightly.
She was about to speak his name, but she realised it would have been futile.
The king was already dead.

The queen straightened up, taking her hands back from him.
She stepped down the pedestal and turned, gliding towards one of the balconies, forcing herself to hold back her tears.
A queen never lost her composure, not even when she was alone. That is what her mother had taught her, and that is what she would have taught her own children, had they lived to see this day.
‘I will do as you ask’ she spoke to the clouds above, holding her hands together as if she were praying. ‘I will carry on your legacy, and do everything in my power….to make this kingdom right again.’ She clenched her jaw, blinking back her tears. ‘This is my promise to you.’
She gave a slight start then, feeling a cold touch upon her skin.
She looked up, seeing little white flakes falling all around her. It was snowing.
‘How?’ the queen whispered. ‘It has never snowed here before. Not ever.’

On the other side of the kingdom, far from the king and queen, was the capital. Within its streets, the people fought one another viciously, one faction against the other. One side who supported Ena, the other who did not.
Within the great seashell shaped building at the centre of the city, were the angels, and their maiden.
They had not left its walls since the day they had first entered, and watched from the balconies now the carnage below them.
‘What have we done?’ Jaspin mumbled to himself looking down at the streets.
‘It’s alright’ Ena replied quietly to him. She was lying on her back on the balcony that opened up to the inside of the building. ‘Everything is going as I planned.’
Jaspin drew his hands back from the balcony, turning to face her.

‘Was this part of your plan?’ he asked her. ‘All this conflict? All this bloodshed?’
Ena did not answer; instead she turned her head very slowly to face him. Jaspin balked.
‘I'm sorry’ he said hastily. ‘I did not mean….I trust you whole heartedly.’
Ena looked to the ceiling again.
‘I know you do Jaspin’ she said. ‘I can see it in your heart.’
‘But what do we do now?’ Gael asked her moving back into the room. ‘We are stuck here now, surrounded by this fighting. There is no way it won’t be noticed by others by now.’
Ena sat up then, swinging her legs over the wall of the balcony and standing up. Her long hair lifted behind her as she drifted forwards. As she went, Reuben and Lilith who were sitting on the floor side by side raised their heads.
As Ena stopped in the centre of the space, Jaspin and Gael joined her side.
As she leant forwards, casting her hands out before her, Lilith and Reuben rose to their feet.
Smoke appeared before Ena, twisting in the air and forming itself into a picture.
Ena made a flurrying motion with her hands, and the picture became clearly visible.
‘There is a place’ Ena spoke holding the smoke between her hands, ‘a place that is far from here, a place where all this will end.’
Reuben tilted his head, narrowing his eyes to see.
‘A mountain?’ he asked.
‘No’ Ena replied. ‘A volcano. It has been dead for millions of years.’
She leant closer to it, the magic from the illusion she created lighting up her features.
‘It is now a lush paradise, it’s so large inside, that it generates is own weather.’
‘It sounds like quiet a place’ Reuben commented.
‘That’ Ena breathed, ‘is where we are going. This place’ she said, ‘is where all this will end. The final battle will take place here.’
The other angels looked at her.
‘This story is coming to a close’ Ena said to them. ‘We will all die soon…and we will go to the next place. I will guide you.’
Her hands began to tremble slightly then, and she held them to her chest.
‘It’s happening’ she said, ‘I can feel it.’
‘What are we waiting for then?’ Jaspin said. ‘Why don’t we go to this place?’
‘Because’ Ena said, her eyes distant, ‘it is on the other side of the world. I do not have the power right now to take us there.’
Gael watched her closely. He turned away, gazing outside to the city beyond where he could hear the distant sounds of the ongoing fights in the street.
His condition was worsening. He was still strong, but the sickness was slowly spreading over his body. Dark patches were visible on his neck now, and his skin was becoming steadily paler.
‘I can make it’ he spoke up suddenly, addressing no one in particular. ‘I will survive to live in the next world.’
The angels and the earth maiden watched him.
They said nothing.

In the town the angels had left behind, Nina was making preparations to head back home.
The soldiers had been disbanded, and there was only Nina and Gerald left.
They had very little in the way of possessions, and it took them only a few short minutes to get ready.
'The carriage is waiting' Gerald told her as she lingered in one of the rooms, gazing out the window at the dark sky beyond. 'Are you ready to leave now?'
'Yes' Nina mumbled. 'I am ready to leave now.'
They left the building; Gerald held the carriage door open for Nina as she climbed in, following after her and closing the door behind him. They sat at opposite ends of the carriage, remaining silent.
The driver snapped the reins, and the carriage jolted to life.
It took them through the streets, which at this time early in the morning were quiet, and out along one of the several main roads leading in and out of the town.
For the longest time, neither of them spoke, until Gerald decided to break the silence.
'I'm sorry about everything' he simply stated.
Nina who had been sitting with her arms folded, raised her head slightly.
'It's alright' she sighed. 'None of it matters.'
'So what will happen now?'
'Nothing' Nina mumbled. 'Nothing at all.' She paused then, staring silently out at the dark world beyond the window. 'We will all die' she whispered.
Gerald raised his head.
The carriage came to a sudden stop, Gerald grabbed onto his seat as he was jolted back.
'What's happened?' he asked in alarm.
Opposite him, Nina had not moved.
'…Nina?'
There was a dull thump from outside, Gerald peered through the window, seeing the body of the driver fallen from his seat. He was not moving.
Gerald sat back, staring at Nina firmly.
'This cannot be' Nina whispered, eyes wide with shock. She had not moved position, and remained where she was in her seat with arms folded and attention lost.
'What is it?' Gerald asked levelly.
The carriage set into motion again, this time the horses were being led by Nina.
They turned around, heading in another direction.
Inside the carriage Gerald watched her silently, waiting for a response. He did not ask again.
'The earth maiden' Nina explained when she was ready, '…she is alive again.'

The snow did not stop falling, not since the moment the king had died.
He had been buried, the funeral had been large, many people turned up. Now the queen was on her own, everything the king had owned, was now hers.
She sat alone in the study now, where she had come to spend most of her time.

She found being by herself was her only solace, and she sent away all the people that had come to see her, the servants, the lords, the messengers. She had refused food, and barely drank the water offered to her.
There came another knock at her door, and like so many of the others, she ignored it, though it persisted.
She barely heard it.
Eventually, the door opened itself, and a figure stepped it.
She would normally have been angry at this disobedience, but now she cared about nothing.
'I said I don't want to see anyone' the queen said without turning.
'You want to see me' came the reply, in a voice far more bold than any servant in the palace she commanded.
The queen looked around. Standing in the open doorway she saw two figures, one was a young woman, tall and slender with long straight black hair. The figure behind her was a man who looked older.
'Who are you?' Grace asked the two, straightening in her chair slightly. 'How did you get in here?'
'We are no one in particular' Nina replied. 'Our names are Nina and Gerald. I have come to you to be in your service.'
Grace suddenly noticed a little animal sitting at Nina's feet. It was a fox, an animal normally shy and fearful of people. But it sat there before Nina, as obedient as any domestic dog. In its mouth it held a white trumped-shaped flower. A lily.
Nina gave the fox nothing more than a brief glance, and the fox trotted straight up to the queen, handing her the flower.
'I am deeply sorry for your loss' Nina told the queen, 'but we are all in danger now. We need each other's help. I'm sure you've heard about the turmoil that grips and capital. I know who is responsible. I have met her.'
'Magic?' Grace uttered, staring in mild surprise down at the fox. 'Is this your pet? How is this possible?'
Nina pursed her lips, tilting her head down to the little fox.
'Not a pet' she said, 'merely something I met along the way.' she paused. 'I can make it do whatever I want. All animals and weaker beings are in my power.'
The fox ran off suddenly, heading to the balcony and leaping on the wall.
It jumped off the edge.
Grace who had watched it looked back in horror at Nina, who remained impassive. She rose from her seat, running to the balcony to look below.
Here she saw the fox beneath her.
It was dead.
'I told you' Nina said to the queen calmly, 'I can control animas and weaker beings.'
'Does that include people?' Grace asked tentatively.
'Sometimes' Nina answered flatly. 'Weaker people….those in grief…in pain…and confusion.'
'People like me' Grace turned to face her, straightening then.

‘I won’t harm you’ Nina replied. ‘I come merely to offer my services to you. I know the source of the problem that brings your kingdom into ruins now. It’s the earth maiden. She is in the capital.’
Grace watched Nina passively.
‘The angels are in her command’ Nina continued. ‘They hide in the capital. That is where I suggest we go.’
‘Angels?’ Grace uttered. ‘But…they are just a legend…nothing but stories.’
Nina shook her head silently.
‘I suggest we go now’ she told the queen. ‘There is much you do not know.’
‘And who are you then?’ Grace asked her.
Behind Nina Gerald watched and listened silently.
‘I…’ Nina began, ‘am the sister of the deceased earth maiden, the *true* one, not the corrupted evil creature this Ena claims to be. I let her go once out of mercy. I see now that was a mistake, one that I will not repeat.’ She paused. ‘I will kill her’ she finished. ‘That will solve all our problems. But first we must head to the capital where she hides. We must go there as quickly as possible. We cannot waste time.’
Grace stared back at this strange couple, lost for words.

Several days passed.

Back in the capital, Jaspin was watching Ena.
The earth maiden was wandering alone through the silent parts of the building in which they resided. At one of the higher levels was a museum, where the most beautiful pictures were displayed. Here is where Ena was, drifting from room to room, her pale green hair had become so long now that it dragged on the floor wherever she went.
At the other end of the corridor Jaspin saw her as she examined the pictures intently. She moved away and Jaspin let out a sigh.
‘Jaspin?’ it was Lilith who had set out to find him, having become a little concerned. ‘Are you alright?’
‘No’ Jaspin shook his head. He turned to her. ‘Don’t you see it?’
Lilith tilted her head slightly at him, eyes wide.
‘Ena’ Jaspin said. ‘She has not been the same since she woke up.’
Lilith looked away; together they stared down the corridor to the room at the end. Ena was here somewhere, but at this time she was out of sight.
‘What exactly do you mean?’ Lilith asked him.
‘She is weaker’ Jaspin replied. ‘She is….falling.’
Lilith glanced back at him for a moment, before looking away again.
She was silent.

In another part of the building, Reuben and Gael were sitting together. They had been mostly silent, speaking only occasionally. At one point Reuben had asked.
‘How do you feel?’
Gael smiled encouragingly, unconsciously lifting the collar of his shirt to hide the black veins that were creeping up his neck and face.

‘I feel great’ he had replied. ‘Really I do.’
Reuben remained unconvinced, though he said nothing. He turned away silently, scratching at his chiselled jaw and sweeping his blonde hair back in frustration.
Outside in the streets, fighting could still be heard. Even after all this time, it had not ceased.

It was some time after that, that Ena came to them.
Reuben and Gael straightened as she entered the room, beaming at them. She approached.
‘You should see the museum upstairs before you die’ she said to them. ‘It is truly beautiful.’
It was as if she didn’t know what was happening in the streets outside, as if she didn’t know and didn’t care.
‘I saw the most wonderful painting of a beach’ she said sitting on the ground cross-legged before them. ‘It’s amazing how much life there is in the sea, the creatures that live down there are stranger than anyone could possibly imagine.’
Reuben turned to her, seeing her pale green hair pooled on the floor around her.
‘Maybe you should cut your hair’ Reuben suggested. ‘It’s getting very long.’
Ena instantly shot a dark look at him. The air around Reuben grew heavy, beginning to hum deeply.
Reuben slumped forwards, throwing up blood as his eyes and ears began to bleed.
‘I will not cut my hair’ Ena told him calmly. ‘Never suggest this again.’
He glanced up at her wide-eyed through his bloody tears.
Ena calmly looked away, releasing Reuben from her spell. He groaned, covering his mouth with a hand and wiping away the blood in silence.
‘What will happen now?’ Gael asked Ena, acting as if he had not noticed. ‘The bodies are piling in the streets. What will happen now?’
‘A great force in on its way here’ Ena replied. ‘The word of our existence here has travelled far.’
‘A great force?’ Gael repeated uncertainly. ‘Are we safe here?’
‘We are safe nowhere’ Ena replied, rising to her feet and drifting away towards one of the balconies.
She stood here with her hand resting on the cold stone, the sky above dark even in midday, as it had been since the day it first arrived. The darkness had never gone away, and the snow had not stopped falling. The land in this part of the world had grown cold.
‘My magic is gathering’ Ena breathed, seemingly unfazed by the cold as she stood there in her thin dress. ‘With each person that dies, my magic intensifies.’
‘So you are allowing them to fight’ Gael said turning to her, ‘for your benefit.’
‘The ones who believe in me…will reach the afterlife I have promised them, another world, a new world…the one I will go to….the one each of you will go to.’ she paused. ‘Aski is probably already there…’
‘So what are we waiting for?’ Gael asked, beside him Reuben chose to remain silent.
‘I need us to travel to the place I told you about’ Ena said to him, ‘the one that is on the other side of the world…but I need magic to do so…magic I gain from the souls of those that have passed, be they with me’ she closed her eyes, ‘or against me…’
‘So you are waiting for more people to die.’

‘Yes’ Ena replied, ‘but an angel’s soul would serve me better purpose, as they are far more powerful.’
Gael rose to his feet, drifting over to her.
‘I am dying’ he said to her, ‘kill me if that serves you…take my soul.’
‘But I still need you’ Ena replied, lifting her head to his. ‘The army is on their way, and I need you to kill as many as you can.’
‘The army?’ Gael repeated doubtfully. ‘Is that what you are waiting for?’
She bowed her head silently, a slight smile playing in her expression.
‘I can sense them’ she breathed. ‘They are coming now.’
The moment she finished speaking, a horn sounded in the distance. Gael looked around. On the floor within the room, Reuben tensed.
‘They know you are here’ she spoke to the room, as Jaspin and Lilith appeared in the room behind them. ‘The angels…’ Ena breathed, gazing at them each in turn. She smiled widely. ‘You are all so beautiful.’

‘Are you sure about this?’ Grace spoke out aloud, as the army surrounded the capital.
She rode her own horse, and gave her orders to the men directly, as her husband had once done. It was clear that the soldiers did not receive her instructions as well as they did her late husband’s, but they obeyed regardless. Though she suspected some within the army doubted her, despite the silence they kept.
‘I am sure’ the voice replied to her. ‘They are in there. I know it.’
Grace turned back to Nina, beside her, riding a horse of his own was Gerald, as silent now as when they had first set out on their journey.
‘They are all there’ Nina continued, ‘the last four remaining angels that exist in this world’ she sighed, ‘and their master…the one they know as the earth maiden.’
Grace turned away, looking forwards towards the city again.
‘What is she like?’ the queen asked tentatively.
‘She is just a child’ Nina replied, ‘a very sick child.’
Grace glanced back at Nina, who said no more.
‘So you think we should attack the city?’ Grace asked.
‘No’ Nina said narrowing her eyes slightly. ‘Only the angels, we must not allow civilians to be hurt.’
Grace was silent. The cold breeze lifted her hair back, and the snowflakes landed softly on her cheeks.
‘I want the world to be healthy again’ the queen said, ‘as it was before my husband fell ill.’
‘We can make it so together’ Nina told her firmly, ‘if we kill the angels…and kill the maiden.’
‘Kill a child?’
‘She is evil’ Nina replied swiftly, thought her voice was calm, as if she were reading from a book. ‘She killed my sister, she’s killed many people….including her own family.’
‘Why?’
‘I don’t know’ Nina replied, ‘but my sister believed it was to spare them from the sickness. Ena believes it will consume everything, but the truth is the sickness is spreading *because* of

her. Her fear and despair make people vulnerable to it. Those that fear and despair the most die first. This I know to be true.'
'How?' Grace asked her. 'How could you possibly know such a thing?'
'It's information that was passed onto me by my sister before she died.'
'But that can't be right' the queen said turning to her. 'Before my husband became ill, we shared the happiest moments of our life together.'
'No you didn't' Nina answered swiftly. 'You were mourning the death of your child who was stillborn. You longed for an heir, now you realise it is too late.'
Nina met the queen's gaze.
'Be careful' Nina spoke sinisterly. 'You may fall ill yourself soon.'
The queen turned away.
'They are sure to meet us soon' Nina spoke up, staring at the tallest tower in the centre of the city. 'I'm sure they are watching us, even at this very moment.'
Nina tilted her head, narrowing her eyes.
'I can feel their presence.'

Within the seashell building in the centre of the capital, the angels were gathering their magic to them. Their wings were splayed, taking up the largest spaces within the room as each of their profiles glowed a different colour.
Reuben's glowed brilliant gold, Gael's light blue like the sky on a summers day, Lilith's pure and unspoiled white, and Jaspin's black and white.
Between them, Ena moved from one to the other, touching them each in turn.
'I hope you are ready' she spoke to all of them and none of them. 'They are waiting for you.'
Her attention lingered on Gael a little longer than it did the others, but she said nothing.
Perhaps she fears for him the most Lilith thought silently as she watched the two. *She fears for him more now that he has the sickness….as the rest of us do.* She bowed her head, sending to the dark heavens above a silent prayer. *Please let him survive this day…*
Ena stepped back then, casting her arms out to the open balcony beside them.
'Go' she commanded them. 'Fly away my birds.'
The angels all extended their wings, moving swiftly towards the balcony and leaping off the edge, their large wings catching them and carrying them away. Gael was the last to leave, a little slower than the rest; he grimaced then, feeling his burn. He gritted his teeth in sudden determination and made his way forwards, following after the others.
Ena watched him go. Nothing was revealed in her expression as she watched Gael soar over the city and towards the army.
'Stay alive' she mumbled after him, before turning and walking away.

The angels flew on a straight course as they headed for the thickest part of the army, where the queen sat upon her horse.
'What do we do?' the queen spoke out loud, seeing the figures in the air drawing swiftly closer.
'Kill them' Nina said without a pause. 'Archers. Aim for their wings; sever the vein that gives them strength. Make them bleed to death.'

Grace raised her hand, signalling to her army to fire.
The angels instantly folded their wings to their bodies, plummeting through the air. They hit the ground in full force, using all of their magic. And Lilith fought like she had never fought before. Her entire body glowed brightly as she cut down the men around her. She hardly noticed the fresh blood rain on her wings, her clothes and hair, flecking her cheeks, running down her hands and arms. This time she fought as a weapon, not standing by as a shield for another. She fought alongside the other angels, killing as many as they did, and doing so without thought or care.
Back in the city, in the highest tower within the seashell building, Ena watched passively.

Chapter Forty Eight
Where the Air is Cleaner

Vanile hugged the little rabbit closer to her, moving further down the field under the supervision of her mother who was not far behind.
'Poor little rabbit' the girl was saying. 'You have to be more careful from now on, there are dangerous things in this world, things that want to eat you. Just remember to stay away from the dogs, and don't come back here.'
Vanile put the rabbit down gently on the floor. It sat frozen for a moment, as if waiting to see what would happen, and then it darted away as quickly as it could, into the hedge nearby and through the tall grass in the field on the other side.
'That was a very good thing you did' her mother said to her. 'You have a kind heart, and a gentle soul.'
Vanile smiled up at her mother warmly.
'Thank you mother.'
Her mother took her by the hand gently.
'Come on' she said moving away with her. 'Your dinner is getting cold. You don't want your father to get moody now do you?'
Vanile giggled then.
'No' she said. 'I suppose not.'
They slowly walked back to the house together.
Around them the day was warm, and the sky above was clear and blue and bright.
'I love you mother' Vanile said to her. 'I love you so much.'

Ena stood on the balcony. From this highest point in the city, Ena could see all that she wanted to see.
The fight raged below her, the angels using all the power they possessed to fight back.
Ena wondered if any of them would survive, and if any of them might die.

‘I need a little more power’ she whispered. ‘Just a little more to take us to where I want to be.’
Around them the world was dark, the light snow relentless. But it did not stick. The instant the icy flakes touched the ground, or the buildings or the trees, they instantly melted, but it never stopped falling.
Ena sighed, feeling a little tired. She leant forward on the balcony, resting her chin in her hands and closing her eyes.
She began to doze, her mind slipping away, until something suddenly made it snap back.
She opened her eyes.
Beside her on the balcony wall, there sat a little bird, a sparrow, watching her innocently.
Ena returned its gaze. She stared at it for the longest time, analyzing it, and then she smiled.
The sparrow was sliced in half without warning, its little insides torn in different directions.
Ena turned away from the bloodied mess on the white balcony, smiling and looking back towards the army, smiling widely.

Just outside the city, Nina came too with a start.
Gerald was by her side in an instant.
‘What happened?’
Nina hugged herself, at first unable to speak, the sensation of being physically ripped apart stuck firmly in her mind. It was terrible. She knew she would never be able to forget it, so for the meantime, she simply put it aside.
‘She knows I am here’ Nina replied when she was able to find her voice. ‘I don’t understand’ she whispered, ‘she is playing a game with me. What could she be wanting? What is she trying to achieve? Why is she so willingly sending the angels out here on their own…I thought the people of the city that supported her would rise up to fight, but…?’
Nina glanced away, looking to the queen who sat cross-legged on the floor a short distance away, staring up at the dark sky in brooding, acting as if she couldn’t hear the angels slaughtering her men so close by.
Nina grimaced, turning her head away from the queen sharply and rising to her feet.
‘This is a trap’ she spoke loudly. ‘Ena is trying to trick me somehow.’ She turned back to the queen, barking an order at her. ‘Tell your men to stop fighting. *Order* them to not attack the angels.’
Grace turned back to her, confusion written on her face.
In the midst of the fighting, Reuben was flying over the heads of the soldiers. A lucky archer fired his arrow, and struck him in his wing, right in the vein that gave his body life.
Reuben gasped deeply in pain, plummeting to the ground instantly and breaking his wings in the fall.
Lilith screamed his name, but he was already dead, Jaspin and Gael instantly retreated, and in the tower, Ena began to laugh.

Nina began to grow afraid as the whole area began to light up around them, magic that soaked into the very earth, magic that was coming from the tower, from the earth maiden.
Nina held onto Gerald tightly beside her, calling out to Grace who was rising slowly to her feet.

But the queen did not hear the words of the healer; she was too disorientated and confused.
Nina closed her eyes tight shut, shielding them from a painfully strong light.
When the light faded, she opened them slowly, and could not hold back a gasp of utter shock and disbelief as she saw what was around them.

They were in another part of the world entirely. There was no snow, and the sky above them in midday was bright and beautiful.

The capital they had left behind, was completely destroyed.

Chapter Forty Nine
The Hunt

Lilith fell to her knees, screaming in despair and pain.
'No!' she wailed. 'We cannot lose another! Not another! Not again!'
'Lilith!' Jaspin snapped at her, though the anguish in his voice could still be heard. 'Lilith get up! We have to find Ena!'
Lilith forced herself to rise, brushing away her tears. Nearby Gael stood silently. He was hugging himself, his skin frightfully pale as he trembled violently.
'Gael?'
He glanced up to Jaspin who had spoken his name, lowered his arms, and nodded silently to him, though his body still shook.
Jaspin turned to Lilith briefly, brushing away her tears that remained gently with his thumb.
'Hurry' he spoke quietly to Lilith and Gael. 'We have to find Ena, she is nearby I can sense her.'
The three remaining angels beat their wings, all taking off the flying in the same direction.
They found Ena who was not too far away. She was unresponsive, lying on the ground on her side with her hair splayed about her.
Jaspin knelt beside her tall and delicate frame, lifting her gently in his arms.
He carried her away, followed by the other two angels.
They travelled to the nearest collection of houses, a modest village that was not too far away.
Ena was completely unresponsive as Jaspin carried her swiftly, flying low over the land.

Nina turned to Grace, grabbing her and shaking her by the shoulders.
'Your majesty, can you hear me?'
Grace blinked suddenly, coming back to herself. Nina let go of her, stepping back.
The army that answered to the queen were all around them. Many had been killed by the angels. Even the dead men lay on the ground here now amongst the living.

‘Where are we?’ the queen spoke aloud. ‘Wait’ she said glancing around her as she suddenly realised something. This is not my kingdom, and the sky…’ she said tilted her head back.
She bit her tongue. She had nothing more to say.
‘This is the other side of the world’ Nina spoke to the queen as Gerald ran his fingers through his hair behind her, sighing heavily. ‘That maiden has brought us here with her wicked magic.’
Nina sneered then, an expression that revealed itself only for a split second.
‘We have to kill her’ Nina said regaining herself again. ‘It was a mistake on my part to keep her alive.’

Later that day, Vanile came downstairs to speak with her father.
It was early in the afternoon, and the sun was still bright in the open sky.
Vanile moved across the room tentatively.
‘Vanile’ her father said, turning to her. ‘Are you alright?’
Vanile bit her lip, staring up at her father nervously.
‘What's wrong?’ her father said, sounding a little worried. ‘Has something happened?’
‘Father?’ Vanile began uncertainly. ‘There are angels in my room.’

Jaspin leant over Ena. She lay on the bed utterly still. Jaspin touched her cheek.
Lilith came up behind him.
‘Is she alright?’ Lilith asked miserably.
Jaspin straightened up.
‘I don’t know’ he replied quietly. ‘I still feel her presence before me, but she feels different…not like she did before.’
‘I understand’ Lilith mumbled. ‘I sense it too.’
Sitting on the floor leaning against the bed beside them was Gael. He had used almost all of his magic fighting the queen’s army outside the capital, doing so on Ena’s command. Before the fight he had been strong, his magic concentrated within his body and mind. Now he was utterly spent.
He sat on the floor hugging his knees to his chest. His white-blonde hair was now a filthy and washed out, his once tanned skin was now grey and blemished, and his misty blue eyes were now white. Even his wings before he withdrew them back into his body had lost their colour.
Before all of this Gael had been the most handsome of the angels. Now he was nothing more but a shadow of his former self, a sorry state to the man he was before.
It had all happened so quickly. He was barely keeping himself together, shivering violently as if he were outside in an icy storm, his touch was freezing, and tears ran down his cheeks.
‘What are we going to do?’ Lilith sobbed.
The door to the room opened suddenly. Jaspin and Lilith whipped around. Standing in the door was a man looking utterly bewildered. Jaspin rounded on him, taking wide strides towards him, doing so with unknown intentions.

The man suddenly panicked, turning and backing away he ran. Jaspin made after him, Lilith calling him, followed in turn, trying to calm Jaspin. He was angry.
Gael remained within the room, noticing nothing whatsoever that was going on around him. A young girl peered into the room, seeing the profile of the tall girl on her bed; she stepped towards her, glancing down at Gael on the floor, who did not acknowledge her presence.
Vanile looked back at Ena, finding her to be so strange, with her abnormally tall and skinny frame. She looked young however, despite her towering height. Her skin was pale and her eyes were sunken, her arm and legs and toes and fingers were freakishly long and thin. She looked as if she might break in the wind. But her hair was what Vanile found most peculiar. Even in the tangled state that it was Vanile could see its length, and its pale green colour was most unnatural.
She didn't know why, but she was somehow drawn to this creature, this strange girl who was perhaps only a little older than herself.
She reached out to touch her, but suddenly the girl snapped awake, grabbing Vanile by the hand. Vanile gasped in fright, trying to pull away. But Ena's grip was vice-like.
'Who are you? What am I doing here?'
Vanile could not answer; only stare back in shock at the stranger lying on her bed. Downstairs she could hear voices, her mother and her fathers.
Vanile whipped her head around, eyes wide. She looked back at Ena, fighting to free herself until Ena let go. Vanile ran to the balcony overlooking the floor below, seeing her mother and father cowering in fear from the angels towering over them. The white haired one seemed to be trying to control the gray haired one, who was consumed with a sudden anger that could not be explained.
'Stop!' Vanile called down to them. 'Leave them alone!'
Jaspin turned back, tilting his head up to the girl. His eyes widened as he saw Ena approach from behind the girl, coming to stand at the railing as the girl backed away.
Ena spoke, staring down at the two angels.
'Who are you' she said, 'and where is my family?'
Jaspin stared up at her in complete shock, not believing what he had just heard.
'Ena…' Lilith breathed stepping forwards. 'It's us…you *know* who we are…'
'What are you doing to those people?' Ena uttered.
'She feels wrong' Lilith whispered urgently to Jaspin beside her. 'It's like it was last time. She is not the earth maiden anymore…'
'I know' Jaspin mumbled back. 'I feel it too.'
Ena stepped across the balcony, moving towards the stairs. As she did so she kept her shoulders hunched and her eyes wide.
She was afraid as she descended the steps, approaching the angels on the floor below.
She slowed to a stop, gazing down at the frightened mother and father huddled against the wall.
Ena looked back at the angels.
'Ena…' Lilith began desperately. 'You *know* who we are.'
'No' Ena shook her head defiantly. 'I've never seen you before in my life.'
'Are you truly saying that you remember nothing?' Lilith asked in shock.
'Where is my family?' Ena begged, turning to Jaspin now.

‘They are dead’ Jaspin replied heartlessly. ‘*You* killed them.’
‘What?’ Ena gasped. ‘No…no it can’t be…’
‘They are all dead by your hands’ Jaspin went on. ‘You killed them to spare them from a fate far worse.’
‘No it isn’t true!’ Ena moaned, becoming hysterical now as she shook her head, backing away from them.
‘Ena…’ Lilith tried to reason. ‘Please be calm.’
‘Get away from me!’ Ena cried, slapping Lilith’s hand away as she reached out to her.
Ena turned and ran, ignoring the others cries as they called after her.
She ran outside but immediately stopped, seeing something before her that twisted something in her mind, forcing to her consciousness something that she knew, something that was familiar to her.
Jaspin and Lilith came up behind her as she stared, seeing the pure white horse in the field right before her.
‘My horse’ Ena mumbled, as Jaspin and Lilith both felt a change within her. ‘What happened to my horse……Vanity?’
She was herself again.
‘You remember?’ Lilith gasped happily.
‘Vanity is dead’ Jaspin spoke beside her. ‘She was killed when the enemy encircled our army…shortly after you killed Freya…’
‘Army?’ Ena mumbled. ‘Freya……yes…yes I remember.’
She bowed her head, holding her hands together in grief. Vanity had been her pride and joy, and Ena was sad to know that she would never see her again.
Unlike humans, animals could not be reincarnated in another life in the next world.
But there was nothing Ena could do, the mare was gone now.
She raised her head.
‘The story is coming to a close’ Ena said. ‘We have to keep moving, we have to get to the paradise.’
She turned then, a sudden wind catching her pale hair and sweeping it back.
‘The volcano’ Ena breathed, seeing the great mountain in the distance. ‘We have to get there, we *have* to……it is where the story will end…it is where we will all die

Jaspin ran back inside to find Gael, grabbing him and hauling him to his feet, ignoring his groans of pain.
‘I'm sorry my friend’ Jaspin muttered to him, ‘but we have to leave swiftly. Ena will show us the way…but the other one is sure to still be after us.’
He was carried downstairs and laid down on a cart. Ena spoke to the family as their white horse was tied with a harness to the cart.
‘I thank you for everything’ Ena was saying, ‘and I didn’t intend for any harm to come to you. I'm sorry if my angels scared you.’
Behind her Jaspin and Lilith finished tying the harness, Lilith went to the horse’s head to lead it, as Jaspin went to the cart behind to check on Gael.
Ena glanced back at him as Jaspin leant forwards to touch his cheek.

‘We’re on our way’ Jaspin whispered to him as Gael breathed weakly on the bed. ‘Try to hold on…just for a little longer……we are going to paradise……’

Ena led the way down the dirt road with Jaspin walking after her, and behind was Lilith who guided the white horse pulling the carriage with Gael within. He looked sicker than ever, but somehow he was still clinging onto life.

The family never saw the strange group again.

At first Nina travelled in the opposite direction to where the angels had gone. There was a town near where the maiden had brought them, and this is where the army was to rest.
The dead were left on the earth where they had fallen, while the living soldiers stormed into the houses and shops and inns, taking from the terrified citizens whatever they needed.
‘We are causing carnage’ Grace uttered, glancing all around her as people screamed and were thrown out onto the streets, their possession destroyed as their homes taken.
‘It is a necessary act that we do here’ Nina replied calmly as they walked slowly through the streets.
‘The angels are gaining ground’ Gerald mumbled to her with concern.
Nina turned to him.
‘Don’t worry’ she said to him confidently. ‘We will catch them up soon enough.’
‘What happens now?’ Grace asked. ‘The king of this land will learn soon enough of our arrival, and we will not be welcome guests.’
‘We will deal with him when the time comes’ Nina replied boldly. ‘But first, we must catch up with the angels.’
‘And then?’
‘We will kill the last three angels in this world’ Nina finished, narrowing her eyes slightly as she spoke. ‘They will become nothing but legends people hear about from story books. We will never again be cursed to look upon such a sight as them, when we rid this world of their existence.’
Beside her Gerald smiled.
‘The men need to rest’ Nina spoke quietly as she raised her head, gazing calmly all around her as the queen’s army sew fear and destruction as they took from the town what they needed, terrifying its people as they went about their way.
‘It won’t be long before the king hears of this’ Grace muttered, as she watched her men move forcefully through the town.
‘The angels first’ Nina answered. ‘They are the most important concern.’
At the edge of the town, an off-duty soldier saw what was happening within his home. After ensuring that his wife and children were safe, he took his fastest horse and fled the town, heading as fast as he could for the palace, moving like a breath on the wind.
He travelled without rest.

It was many days that the earth maiden and the angels travelled, heading in a straight line towards paradise, the dead volcano where everything would end.
Directly in their path was a large town, so it was here they stopped.
'Are you alright Gael?' Lilith whispered to him, leaning over the cart the white horse pulled.
He blinked slowly, smiling up at her with teary eyes.
She smiled encouragingly back at him.
'We've just come to a town' she told him. 'There is a holy temple somewhere within……we are taking you there.'
'He is holding on' Jaspin noted as he glanced over her shoulder. 'His will to live is incredible.'
'He cannot die yet' Lilith answered meekly, straightening up. 'He still has a duty to do. He still has to serve the maiden.'
They glanced around at her. Ena was standing at the horse's head, rubbing her hand affectionately down its forehead as it stood over the water trough, a thing which sat outside one of the inns. They were near the edge of the town, and they still had a long way to go before reaching the holy temple.
'Come on' Jaspin mumbled, moving away. 'We should keep going.'
They moved through the crowded and congested town, their pace slowed by the people around them.
Jaspin left their side often to wander the area and ask for directions, but eventually they found the temple.
'Here it is' Ena sighed, staring up through the great tall iron gates and into the modest grounds beyond.
The grass in the garden at the front was cut short, and there were many fountains and pools spewing water. The building itself was tall and grey, looking to be only modest in size.
'Well' Ena whispered, 'let's go inside.'
She reached a hand out to touch the cold black gates, pushing them open slowly so that the white horse pulling the cart could enter. As the horse, guided by Lilith walked forwards, Jaspin leaned into the cart briefly, touching Gael's cheek. Gael opened his eyes, glancing at Jaspin for a moment, before sighing and becoming still again.
He was still clinging onto life, and that's all that mattered.
The path the reach the front door of the temple was made of a single smooth block of stone. As they made their way forwards, the horse slipped a little once or twice. The path was wet from excess water splashing out from the fountains around them, of which were many.
There were no steps at the front door, only level ground, and as Ena pushed the wooden doors open to allow the others to enter, the entire building could be seen on this level. Everything was open and spacious, with large archways flanked by delicately carved stone columns of intricate design that looked like they might crumble in the wind. Very thinly carved ivy was set within the grey stone, and tiny stone leaves curled outwards. The temple inside was simple and modest, but beautiful all the same.
The holy figures that approached them wore loosely fitting, faded purple robes, their hair tied neatly back and a string of silver beads hanging at their waists.

‘Welcome strangers’ one of the holy men said extending his arms in greeting. ‘How may we serve you?’
Ena slowed to a stop, behind her Jaspin did the same, halting the white horse, as Lilith standing on the other side of the carriage stood still.
Ena smiled widely at the holy figure before her, behind which were several more.
‘We seek, sanctuary’ Ena spoke softly, placing a hand upon her heart. ‘We want only a place to rest, but more importantly, we seek aid for our fallen one.’
‘A fallen one?’
Ena stepped back, indicating the cart behind the horse.
The holy figure stepped forward, looking down at Gael before him.
‘He is very weak’ the holy man said immediately. He looked up at Ena. ‘How long has he been this way?’
Ena looked to the ground as she thought, before looking up again.
‘Days’ she said.
The holy man nodded.
‘I understand’ he said. ‘We will help him, and we will off you respite also. We only wish to serve travellers and all those in need.’
Ena smiled softly, bowing her head to him, her long pale hair falling forwards.
‘I thank you’ she said to him. ‘We are all extremely grateful.
Lilith touched Gael gently. He opened his eyes.
‘Gael’ she whispered, as the holy figures moved around them. ‘We are here. You're going to be cared for. You’ll be alright now.’
Gael turned to face her, smiling weakly, his once misty-blue eyes had paled to the point they were almost pure white.
‘You're going to be alright now’ Lilith told him again, as the holy figures moved around the cart with a stretcher. ‘We will be here with you.’

Ena, Lilith and Jaspin stood close to one another, watching silently as Gael was taken away. Another holy figure approached, taking their horse also.
‘There are stables out the back’ he told them briefly. ‘Your horse will be cared for there.’
Ena nodded to him mutely and the man went away.
‘What do we do now?’ Lilith asked quietly.
Ena breathed slowly before speaking.
‘We wait’ she uttered, ‘just for a moment.’
‘We cannot wait for too long’ Jaspin prompted. ‘The others would still be after us.’
Ena did not answer, her eyes suddenly seemed distant, her mind distracted.
Jaspin glanced around at her. ‘…Ena?’

Gael was taken just around the corner, where there was a steep set of stairs that led to a floor down below, where another section of the temple was completely hidden from the public eye. From above the temple looked tiny, which it was, but there were secret rooms underground, large rooms where the holy figures concealed themselves.
‘What should we do with him?’ one of the holy figures asked.

The other holy figure that had carried the stretched glanced down at Gael, seeing his weak breath. He looked to be on deaths door already. His skin was ghostly pale, horrid black veins were visible along the sides of his neck, reaching now up to his cheeks and either side of his forehead. Even his hair had become a washed out colour, appearing almost white now, but a filthy white, a dirty white.
'I don't know' the other figure spoke up. 'Perhaps killing him would be a kindness.'
'The message sent to us before was correct' the first man said. 'But how did the person know they would be arriving?
The second man shook his head. 'More importantly, how did they manage to get an albatross to deliver a message? Such a thing has never been caught before let alone tamed.' He shook his head frowning. 'The message…' he went on in a quiet voice, 'it said we should kill him…but why?'
'Do you believe what the message said, about these people being angels, and the green haired girl their master?'
'I don't know' the second man shook his head again. 'I just don't know…'
'So what do we do? Do we try to save him, or just kill him right here?'
The second man breathed a heavy sigh. 'Well…' he said at last. 'I think we should let god decide.'
'What?' the first said uncertainly.
'We do nothing' the second man said straightening up. 'If he lives, it is by god's will, if he dies…it is by god's will.'
He turned and left the dark room, the first man hesitated, glancing back at Gael. He took a blanket from the shelf, placing it carefully over his body, before leaving him to his fate.
'I hope you are in gods favour' the holy man said, before leaving Gael alone.

Lilith and Jaspin stayed inside the temple, while Ena went outside to wander the small garden around the temple.
Lilith rested on the sill before one of the large widows, gazing sadly out to the world beyond these stone walls, she watched the people in the streets.
She saw the gentlemen in the streets with their top hats and canes, the ladies hanging off their arm as they were guided forwards, many wearing corsets with feathers of exotic birds in their hats, some of the ladies carried small parasol's to protect themselves from the sun. That young couple there that Lilith saw, they looked to be newlyweds, sticking close together and constantly smiling at one another in doey-eyed admiration. And that other couple passing swiftly by in the opposite direction, a gentleman and his lady both a little older, they looked to be on their way to the theatre.
Lilith's eyes grew dull as she suddenly noticed a shabby-looking child hanging on a street corner, eyeing up the pockets of every noble passing by.
'It was so long ago' Lilith mumbled as Jaspin came up behind her, 'but I still remember when I lived out in the cold, stealing and sleeping on rooftops to survive. I remember sharing this life with a young girl…but I've forgotten her name.' Lilith's attention moved from the figures bustling in the street beyond the temple and back to her own reflection. She lifted a hand to her own face, touching the scars that were etched into her skin. 'I look hideous.'

‘No’ Jaspin spoke softly, taking her hand and holding it in both of her own, ‘you are beautiful.’
She blinked in surprise at this, before smiling gently up at him. They turned then, looking back through the glass and to the streets once more.
Horses and carriages moved slowly alone the cobbled roads carrying their passengers, alongside men on bicycles riding carefully on the edge of the pavement. And in the distance, further out from the centre of the town, could be see the smoke from a train passing through, the best mode of transport these days for people travelling great distances. It was available to both the rich and the poor. Lilith remembered vaguely when she rode once on a train, to see a house she intended to buy, with a man she intended to marry, a man whose name she had long since forgotten. A man who had disowned her when he found out what she really was…like so many others had in her past.
‘They all look so peaceful’ Lilith said watching the people in the streets, ‘…don’t they?’
‘Yes’ Jaspin replied sombrely, ‘they do.’
Lilith glanced up at him with large eyes. She thought to herself as she gazed at him, *I have never known a love like this in all my life.*
‘Do you think things will ever be as they were?’ Lilith asked Jaspin. ‘Before all of these bad things happened?’
Jaspin bowed his head, letting go of her hand and letting it fall slowly back onto her lap.
‘No’ he said at last, ‘I don’t.’
Neither of them moved, as they watched the outside world from their little shelter.
‘I hope Gael will be alright’ Lilith said mournfully.
‘I hope so too’ Jaspin mumbled. ‘…We can only pray…’

Outside, Ena weaved between the many pools that surrounded the small temple, trailing her long slender fingers along the low walls, feeling the cool touch of the water that splashed her pale skin lightly.
She raised her head then, seeing one of the holy figures, recognising him instantly by his loosely fitting purple robes. The man smiled kindly at her.
‘Hello traveller’ he said to her. ‘You must have travelled a long way to get here.’
‘Yes’ Ena spoke quietly, ‘I have.’
The holy figure bowed his head, sweeping his hand over the water of the pool between them. Unbeknown to Ena however, as he did this, the tiny vial he concealed beneath his sleeve tipped its clear contents into the water, polluting it.
The holy figure smiled to Ena again.
‘Drink’ he said. ‘The water here is blessed. It will make you strong again.’
Ena bowed her head to the clear water, rippling before her as the fountain nearby rained constantly into the pool.
Ena reached into the pool, her fingers touching the water that instantly soothed her skin.
She cupped her hands before her, collecting the water between her palms. The holy figure opposite her, kneeling on the other side of the pool watched quietly as Ena lifted her hands to her lips, drinking deeply the water that trickled down her neck and arms.
‘It’s refreshing’ she breathed, lowering her hands.

She tensed then, body hunched over, hands pressed to her heart.
'What have you done to me?' she shuddered.
The holy figure before her tilted his head.
'The angels will never be able to touch you again.'
A shadow fell over him then, and the holy figure still kneeling before the pool, turned calmly to the figure that stood behind him.
It was Jaspin, behind him a step back was Lilith.
Jaspin's expression was furious; his chest rose and fell sharply as he breathed deeply. But the man before him stared back with a calm expression.
Jaspin cast his hand out in one sweep, using his magic to slit the man's throat. The holy man fell to the side; body slumped as he bled profusely into the pool, quickly staining the water red.
Jaspin quickly circled the pool, grasping Ena by her shoulders and hauling her to her feet.
'What has he done to you?' he snapped.
But something in Ena's expression suddenly changed.
'Get off me! Don't touch me!'
'Ena?'
'I don't know who you are!' she screamed.
'Oh not this again…'
'Jaspin!' Lilith called to him and he turned, his heart freezing in his chest at the sight of archers on the rooftops all around them. 'They've found us!' Lilith cried.
Jaspin grasped Ena roughly then, lifting her in his arms without hesitation, ignoring her protests.
'Cover me!' he hollered to Lilith, unfurling his black and white wings as she summoned her magic beside him in compliance.
Jaspin quickly took off with all haste, Lilith taking flight with him.
She defended him as Jaspin tore through the sky, escaping while he could, before the archers could fully surround the temple, before there was truly no way out. Jaspin bolted away as fast as his wings would allow, Ena's slim frame not slowing him down in the slightest.
Lilith flew directly behind him, her snow-white wings leaving a glowing trail of white light after her as she went, a part of the magic emanating from her. She cast her magic out far, as far as she could reach, attacking the archers with her spells, her mind focused on only one thing.
She killed them, and eliminated the thing that threatened them now, threatened the earth maiden.
She descended swiftly, landing hard upon one of the stone pillars that flanked the gates at the back of the temple, turning, her great wings flailing in the air above her, and standing tall she cast more spells at the men still standing, as Jaspin behind her holding Ena, fled.
Lilith thought she had stopped them all, but there was one left that still had her in his sights.
He pulled the string of his bow back, and fired.
Lilith drew a sharp intake of breath as the arrow struck her in the wing, gripped by a sudden panic as she feared it had hit her vital vein. For an instant she feared sharing the same death as Reuben, but instead saw with great relief, that it was not so. Her wing was whole, the vein had been missed. Without giving the archer another opportunity to fire, and withdrew her

wings sharply into her back again. Glancing down to the street behind her, she saw more men on the ground approaching with weapons raised. It seemed that the healer Nina, and the queen known as Grace, had sent a group of men ahead to hunt them. She could see in their eyes that they intended to kill her. But she would do everything in her power to resist them, just to see Ena again, and Jaspin…

The arrow that stuck from her wing fell to the stone floor below with a clatter.

Lilith leapt off the column, running back to the temple as several more archers on the ground behind her opened fire. But she was too far away, and the tall fence between them separating the temple grounds from the rest of the town, stopped many of their arrows.

'I have to live' Lilith muttered under her breath. 'I have to see them again…'

She entered the temple again through a tall door, slamming it shut behind her.

She had only gotten a few steps ahead however, when she was grabbed from behind by a figure.

'I don't wish to hurt you' the male holy figure hissed sharply. 'Please do not struggle.'

But Lilith did not hear these words; caught in a blind panic she fought him.

The holy figure dragged her backwards, and to a small well in the corner of the temple. He hit her in the side, striking a pressure point and causing her to fall limp. Lilith collapsed in his arms. The holy figure lifted her, moving her over the well and dropped her.

Unable to move her body, Lilith fell like a stone, her wings utterly out of her control she could not summon them. She fell into the darkness and into a great cavern. There was no water here, just an empty cave within which grew strange mushrooms unnaturally large in size. One of these caught her as she fell, and Lilith rolled, her descent slowed, she landed on solid ground hitting her head. She was knocked unconscious.

Back inside the temple, the holy figure that had thrown her called out to the men that stormed through the door, weapons raised.

'She went that way' the figure called, pointing to a small door that led to the lower ground hidden beneath the temple. 'Quickly before she escapes!'

The soldiers did not pause but made their way immediately towards the door, the first men charging down the narrow stairs, the following trailing slowly after.

'Run' the holy man whispered when the soldiers had gone. 'Do not come back.'

He turned on the spot, gasping in horror to see another man standing directly behind him.

This man looked different from the others that had passed not moments ago, he was not heavily armoured like they were, but wore no armour at all. His clothes were loosely fitting and dark mottled in colour, perfect for breaking up his silhouette.

'Assassin?' the holy man uttered, staring into the man's scarred face, his eyelids burned away, the man stared back unblinking.

He impaled the holy man with a knife concealed in his baggy robes, striking upwards through his jaw and right into his brain.

The holy man was dead before the assassin jerked the knife sharply out of his head, in one swift move wiping the blade clean before concealing it again.

He marched through the small door, as the man lay on the floor bleeding, heading to the dark rooms below the temple with the intent of finding the angels and killing them.

In the dark rooms Gael heard the noise, dragging himself out of the bed with a groan he made his way gingerly through the dark and towards a great crevasse in the ground within his room, a thing that had been here since the structure was built so very long ago.
Gael heard the men's running footsteps coming closer. He took one breath, and then another, then tilted forwards, falling head first into the crevasse and into the dark, to accept whatever was below him.
Perhaps the fall would kill him, perhaps not. But if he stayed here in this room, his death within the next few seconds was guaranteed.
And it was only a few seconds later, when the men arrived.
The entire complex beneath the temple was searched, and many crevasses were found penetrating many of the rooms.
The scarred man approached one of them slowly.
'I've heard stories of the dark rooms below the temple' one of the men beside him spoke quietly, staring into the crevasse at the darkness beneath his feet. 'They say it's like a maze down there.'
The scarred assassin narrowed his eyes, but nothing of the darkness could be seen.
He went over to the wall where there was a burning torch. He took it, letting it fall into the crevasse. By these means he was able to see briefly before the torch became concealed by foliage, the great wide-headed mushrooms that grew in the dark. There were many of them, they would break his fall.
'Hey wait!' one of the surrounded men said as the assassin without a word or pause stepped forwards, plummeting through the dark and out of sight.
He was gone, and he wasn't coming back by this way.
The others stayed behind, staring hopelessly into the abyss.
'Is he going to try to kill the angels himself?' one of them wondered in awe.

Lilith lay there in the dark for only a short time before her body woke and she opened her eyes.
The first thing she noticed, was the darkness. The second thing, was the pain in her head where she had suffered as she fell, and other aches all over her body.
Lilith groaned, sitting up and pushing herself up gingerly. The pain in her head at first was excruciating, but it slowly ebbed away.
She looked about her as her eye adjusted to what little light there was down here. She was in a large cavern, or so it appeared, but she was not completely alone. There were strange creatures in the dark nearby, at first Lilith thought they might be trolls, but in truth she didn't know what they were.
They were talking amongst themselves in broken dialect. Lilith only understood a small portion of it.
'Strangers down here, foreigners. Find them and eat them.'
She drew a steady breath, remaining utterly still, hidden here where she had fallen as she sat amongst the strange giant mushrooms that had caught her as she fell.
She leant forwards ever so slightly, daring to catch a glimpse of whatever was out there.

One of them came threateningly close, passing across the space near her. Lilith was able to catch a glimpse of it.
It was hunched over, walking on all fours with bizarre-looking deformed feet, mighty claws at the front at the ends of fingers bent and twisted in all different directions, and at the back, misshapen hooves, almost like that of a horse's. It has a small head, massive round eyes to see in the dark, and oversized tusks that grew from its lower jaw, curving right the way over its back.
Lilith's eyes widened in fear as she saw this, remaining utterly silent.
They weren't trolls. Lilith didn't know what they were.
There were three of them she counted, though she feared there may be more.
They shuffled about, groaning at each other in a mostly foreign language. They moved off.
It was several minutes later that Lilith dared to emerge from her hiding place, doing so tentatively.
It was frightening in this dark world she had found herself in, and she didn't know which way to go, and she feared the strange creatures finding her. She was terrified of them; she didn't know what they were, or what they would do to her if she was caught.
Lilith made to go the other way to where the creatures had gone, intending to wander these dark and foreboding passages alone.
But then a voice cried out, a low and moaning voice, though the word was indistinguishable.
'Guuuuuuuurrrrll!'
Lilith broke into a run, stumbling through the darkness she fell, cutting her knees and elbows; she scrambled desperately forwards without pause, thinking only of escape.
But then one of the creature appeared before her, having moved at impossible speed, it had somehow found another path to circle around her, cutting her off and trapping her, its huge lumbering frame bearing down on her.
The other two massive creatures caught her up from behind.
There was nowhere to go.
'Whatsssssssis?' one of the creatures leered over her, as Lilith began to tremble, frozen to the spot.
'Plaey……plaey…..is it plaey….?'
One of them reached out, swatting at her with his mighty claw.
Lilith cried out in pain as the monster slashed her waist deeply, she fell to the side as she felt warm blood seeping down her body and down her leg, clutching at the wound desperately in an attempt to stop the bleeding.
Her wings released themselves suddenly, an automatic reaction to the pain. She was unable to control it.
'*Bright bright!*' one of the creatures hissed, shielding its eyes and backing sharply away.
Lilith's pure white wings glowed beautifully in the dark.
'Rip off…tear them to *shredssssss*…..' another hissed angrily, its eyes beginning to water with agony of the light.
Lilith gave a low moan, sobbing in fear.
Oh god someone help me!
She did not think her rescuer, would be the man who was trying to kill her.
'Step away from the mutant!'

Lilith glanced up wide-eyed. From the fierce light of her wings, she was able to see a figure standing behind one of the creatures. Her heart in her chest constricted in horror at the sight of him, his face scarred, his eyelids burned away. He looked to be exactly the thing he accused Lilith to be.
'Whatssssisss?' one of the leering monsters turned to him. 'Fun? *Moar fun?*'
Without pause the stranger slashed at the monster before him, his demeanour utterly calm and controlled. The great beast fell in a single sweep of his sword, dead before it hit the ground.
What had he done?
The other creatures turned slowly towards him, growling deeply as they advanced cautiously, turning their backs on Lilith. The assassin took a step away.
Lilith stole this opportunity to flee, rising swiftly and running away, using her great wings which she curled forwards to light her way.
I have to run! I have to get out of here….I have to find the others…
She ignored to horrid noises coming from behind her, rounding a corner and becoming hidden from view from the man that sought her. Even her glow became invisible to him.
It wasn't long before he began calling for her.
'Where are you?! I'm going to find you! You hear me?! You cannot escape!'
Lilith ran until her legs burned, her breath came in wheezes.
She ran, and did not look back.

Chapter Fifty
Broken Glass

Jaspin flew, landing as close as he dared, and as far as he dared. He wished not to be caught by the enemy that pursued them, but he also wished not to leave Lilith behind.
He scanned the skies above the town, desperately searching for her. But she was not to be found.
'Oh god, please don't make it so…' Jaspin uttered.
Ena he had been carrying in his arms shifted then, uncomfortable in his grasp.
He put her down.
'What is going on?' She demanded. 'Who are you people?'
Why? Jaspin thought miserably. *Why is this happening?*
He turned away from her, looking towards the sky again.
'Why have you abducted me?'
Jaspin turned back to Ena.
'What has happened to you?' he asked her mournfully.
She simply stared at him, blinking slowly. She did not understand.
'I have to find her….' Jaspin said distractedly. 'I have to find Lilith.'

‘Why?’ Ena asked. ‘Why do you care so much for her?’
‘Because….’ Jaspin said, ‘…I love her….’
Ena stared at him.
‘Where is my family?’ she asked.
‘They are dead.’
Ena drew a sudden gasp then, hand going to her mouth as her lip began to tremble.
She fell to her knees then, sobbing into her hands.
‘They’ve been dead for a while’ Jaspin told her, turning to face her and feeling a little uncomfortable now.’
‘No…’ Ena mumbled unhappily through her tears. ‘No it isn’t true…I just saw them yesterday…we were eating together….and playing in the garden…and tending to the animals….’
She fell silent as she began to cry quietly. Jaspin watched her uncertainly, feeling a little guilty now.
He went over to her, touching her shoulder gently.
Ena raised her head suddenly, staring at her palms.
‘…why am I crying…?’
Jaspin drew back sharply then as what felt like an electric current shot through his body from the point of contact with Ena.
He moaned in agony, holding himself, body hunched over.
‘What happened….?’ He gasped.
Ena straightened up, rising to her feet and standing tall.
‘The angels will never be able to touch you again.’
‘It seems I have been cursed’ Ena spoke casually. ‘The holy figure you killed…the one who encouraged me to drink from the pool…that is the one who has done this to me.’
Jaspin straightened now, facing Ena.
‘It seems you cannot touch me. You cannot fly me to safety.’ She paused. ‘I am easier prey for my hunters to find me.’

Lilith ran, using the white glow from her wings to light the way.
I have to keep going…I have to keep going…
She slowed to a stop then, sensing something nearby.
Lilith glanced to the side, feeling shock at what she saw there.
She moved forwards through the tunnels, towards a section that branched out in another direction, where the ceiling had caved in.
Here she saw someone.
‘……Gael…?’
He raised his head, visible in the gloom by a small beam of sunlight that broke through rock in the ceiling above.
Lilith glanced behind her the way she had come, fearful she was still being pursued.
She looked back through the gaps in the fallen rubble, stepping forward and pressing a hand gently to the stone before her.
‘….Lilith?’ came Gael’s weak voice. ‘Is that really you?’

‘It’s me Gael…’ Lilith sobbed. ‘Are you alright?’
He didn’t answer, but Lilith could hear his breath in wheezes.
‘Stay where you are’ she told him quietly, hissing in an urgent voice through the gap in the rocks. ‘Stay hidden…stay quiet. I will find a way around to you.’
Lilith heard only a moan in reply, as if he was trying to speak, but it pained him too much to do so.
She felt a tug at her heart, turning swiftly from him and running up the passage. She began to search for a way to reach him, in the labyrinth she had found herself in. The web of tunnels within this massive cavern she had been thrown into.
‘Oh god….’ She whimpered, feeling blood within her throat as she jogged forwards, out of breath and trembling. ‘Please hold on Gael……please hold on…’

She didn’t know how much time had passed, but it felt like a long while later, until at last she found a passage that led to him.
Lilith rounded a bend in the path, seeing Gael before her.
She skipped slightly in her footsteps as she ran forwards, falling to her knees before him.
She maintained only the smallest distance between them, as she reached tentatively to touch him.
‘…Gael?’
He felt her fingertips brush his cheek, and raised his head, smiling weakly at her.
‘Lilith….’ he sighed, ‘…….thank god yours still alive……I thought that madman would have killed you.’
‘Mad man?’
His expression turned serious, and he bowed his head.
‘There was a man I saw’ he uttered, ‘speaking to me through the rocks as you had done. He told me horrible things……he wants to torment us…’
‘Do not listen to him’ Lilith told him hastily. ‘He wants to hurt us, we have to get away.’
Gael paused, breathing slowly. ‘I'm so glad you found me.’
‘Come on’ Lilith said to him, rising and grasping him by the arm, pulling him up. ‘We have to go.’
Gael found his feet, pulling back from Lilith; he lifted himself to a wobbly stand.
‘Are you alright?’ Lilith asked, her voice wavering as she fought back tears. ‘…You look awful…’
‘Let’s just keep going’ Gael said. ‘There is an underground temple near here…I passed it earlier.’
He blinked slowly, staring into the darkness the way Lilith had come.
‘We have to head the other way…’ he mumbled, ‘that stranger is hunting us.’
Lilith slung his arm around the back of her neck, holding him around the waist, helping to support him as they went.
‘Where are Jaspin and Ena?’ Gael asked.
‘I don’t know’ Lilith replied trembling, ‘but I hope they are far away. Far away and safe.’

Lilith and Gael moved at a steady pace through this dark world, following Gael's instructions, and going back the way he had come, Lilith all the while glancing fearfully behind her for that man.
But he was nowhere to be seen.
Lilith looked ahead again, concentrating on helping to carry Gael as they moved together onwards. Lilith was frightened to realise how light he felt in her grasp, how thin his frame was, and how cold he felt.
Don't think about it…just concentrate on getting to safety…
Their progress seemed agonizingly slow, but what felt like long last, they finally reached the place Gael had spoke about.
'There…' he breathed, lifting his sunken eyes to the strange building before him, 'the temple…'
It was a strange place, small in size with what looked like stone tombs surrounding it from the outside. There was no roof, only remnants of one that had once been. Between the large stone arches that would have held up the roof, were smaller wooden beams, rotten and crumbling away. Lilith knew instinctively that it was the damp that had caused this; she could feel the cold dew in the air around her.
This place is lonely she thought.
'What makes you think we are safer here?' Lilith asked him, trying to make herself sound strong.
Gael bowed his head, taking a deep breath.
'It's as good a place to hide as any' he replied.
Lilith ignored the sinking feeling in her heart, and made her way forwards, carrying Gael with her.
'We are nearly there' she whispered encouragingly to him as they trudged forwards. 'Come on…just a little bit further…'
They entered the modest doors which were left open a crack, slipping through quietly and stepping into the body of the temple. The temple inside was as unusual and eerie as it was on the outside. There was a small alter at the head, and either side, sheets and sheets of stained blue glass positioned at an angle. As Gael and Lilith stepped forward and glanced towards these windows, as they gazed between them, they saw little cushions resting upon the floor.
'This where people prayed' Lilith murmured, staring down at the cushions, now mouldy and damp. 'I wonder what happened here. I wonder why this temple was abandoned.'
'Many temples in our own kingdom were abandoned because of the sickness which claimed the lives of all the holy figures that lived there' Gael droned, turning away. 'Perhaps the same has happened here too…and the place fell into neglect.'
'But the sickness has not reached here yet.'
Gael bowed his head, but said nothing.
He was tense, his breath short and sharp. He grimaced, clutching at his navel.
'It hurts….' He whispered pathetically. 'It hurts so much…'

‘Please hold on’ Lilith begged him. ‘We will get out of here….*together*. We will find Jaspin again, find Ena and be reunited.’ She gazed at him sadly, feeling tears pricking in her eyes. ‘I wish there was something I could do.’
Gael moved away from her and Lilith let go. He leant back against one of the glass sheets, holding himself. He grimaced as he tried to straighten up.
‘Water…’ he gasped.
His eyes had paled to almost pure white then.
‘Alright’ Lilith mumbled. ‘There are rivers down here’ she said glancing back. ‘I can hear them…’
A shadow moved behind Gael, on the other side of the glass.
Gael drew a sharp intake of breath as the blade pierced the glass, protruding right the way through his body.
Lilith stared.
The assassin jerked the sword sharply back from the glass, and the light from Gael’s eye faded.
He slid to the floor, and died.
Lilith could not tear her eyes away. Her brain was sluggish. Everything felt like a dream, like none of it was really happening.
The assassin walked around the glass, wiping his sword clean.
‘Found you…’
Horror slowly descended over her, and for the first time, she was able to see clearly the man that hunted them, if he could be called a man at all. He was a nightmare, with a scarred face, and eyelids that had burned away. He fixed her with his gaze, ever unbroken.
Lilith took a step back.
‘You say you want to protect people’ the stranger said to her in a deadly voice, ‘yet you kill those you claim to protect.’
‘No…’ Lilith shook her head. ‘No it isn’t like that…you don’t understand…’
The assassin sheathed his sword, very slowly, advancing on Lilith menacingly.
‘Stay away from me…’ Lilith trembled, taking a step back.
The assassin smiled then, with cruelty.
‘I will give you twenty seconds.’
‘What?’
‘Twenty….nineteen…’
Lilith turn-tailed and ran as fast as she could, terror and panic clawing at her heart.
She ran.

Her breath came in wheezes, she tasted blood in her mouth, and her body ached all over.
She was terrified, terrified that this was the end.
No, please don’t let me die here!

It wasn’t long before she heard a voice calling for her.
‘I'm coming for you!’ he screamed. ‘I'm going to find you!’
Lilith sobbed desperately, tears streaming down her face, sweat beaded her brow.

She sprinted through the dark, trying to find a way out of the tunnels, all the while; the voice that followed her was growing closer.

Chapter Fifty One
Mystery

He found her shortly after, cornering her, trapping her.
Lilith was sure that this was the end, was sure that he would draw his sword and plunge it straight into her heart.
But he didn't. Instead he kept his sword sheathed, but he still hurt her.
He kicked her and beat her, cracking her head against the rock and stamping on her leg, breaking her bones.
Lilith cried out in agony, begging him to stop. But he did not listen.
She crawled on her belly towards the light at the end of the tunnel, fingernails scratching at the rock as she dragged herself forwards, the blood on her face mixed with tears as she cried.
She raised her head then, sobbing as she reached forward again, pulling herself across the cold rocky floor.
The footsteps that echoed in the tunnel were right behind her.
The assassin followed her as she made her way forwards, finally exiting the tunnel and moving into the open. The sunlight so beautiful and warm poured over her body, and sky above so clear and bright.
Lilith stopped moving, resting on the edge of the cliff with an arm dangling over the drop.
'Are you just going to give up?' the assassin asked her. 'Is there no fight left in you?'
'Kill me….' she wheezed through broken teeth. 'Do not toy with me….just…kill me if you must…I am ready to accept my end…'
The assassin hesitated for a moment. Lilith began to cry openly now, filled now with the primal fear any animal would feel when they knew their end was coming. It was an emotion too strong to describe, too strong to understand…unless you felt it for yourself.
Lilith stared at the drop below her, her vision unclear as tears fell from her eyes.
She heard the sound of the assassin drawing his sword from his sheath, the ring of the metal a final note that hung in the air.
She closed her eyes tight shut, waiting for the long thin blade to pierce her body. The suspense was unbearable. But even after many seconds, nothing happened.
'What are you waiting for?!' Lilith pleaded. 'Just do it….*please!*'
But the assassin sheathed his sword suddenly. Lilith still staring at the drop below her, didn't understand the sound, didn't understand what was going on.
Until she heard another sound.
She did not recognise it, and so she looked around, daring to see the assassin again.
He was taking the bow he carried on his back and nocking an arrow in place.
Lilith glanced around, her sights turning to the sky above.
She was in so much pain and confusion, that her brain did not process what she was seeing.

Jaspin was tearing through the air, heading towards them, but Lilith didn't even recognise him.
The assassin drew back the bowstring, standing with perfect posture as he aimed for Jaspin, waiting until he was close enough to hit his wing, aiming for the vein.
He fired, but missed.
Jaspin crashed into him, the two fighting viciously in a tangle of limbs.
Lilith however did not see any of this in her desperation to get away. She began to rise gingerly to her feet.

It was unclear exactly what had happened after that, whether or not she had deliberately stepped off the cliff, or had fallen by accident. But when Jaspin glanced to where she had been after he had overpowered and killed the assassin, he found that she was not there.

Six months later

"The butterfly girl smiled, 'each night I patrol the borders of my lands to keep out the evil beasts. Now that our kingdoms are at peace, perhaps you can join me?'
Cain looked at the girl, 'I would like that very much.'
'Then let's go.'
The girl transformed into the butterfly, and the boy transformed into the wolf.

Each night they ran side by side, working together to protect the lands at peace. They became very good friends, almost like brother and sister. Cain's reputation as a fearsome creature of war had diminished. He was now considered a protector of all and he fought alongside the butterfly for many years. Together the two protected the two kingdoms for generations.
Cain's story had finally ended."

'That is a wonderful story' Marin sighed, as his brother closed the book.
'I thought you heard it before' Ernest said, rising and placing the book carefully back on the shelf.
'I have' Marin beamed, 'but I never get bored of it.'
Beside them on the sofas, sat Jerry, Reynolds and Demetrius, they had been silent the entire time, listening to the story being told.
Marin turned to the only female in the room, speaking her name.
'Mystery…'
She smiled, sliding one of the books back on the shelf before her, before turning around to face them.

She was in her late thirties, though still looked young and beautiful, with smooth skin and black hair loose around her shoulders.
She dressed finely, in dark clothes with buckle shoes bearing short heels.
‘Yes Marin?’ the woman named Mystery grinned playfully back at him.
All the men within the room were brothers, and they were similar ages with only a few years different between them.
‘What are you doing over there?’ Marin grinned at her. ‘Weren’t you listening to the story?’
Mystery smiled, turning away again to gaze at the books beside her.
‘I was listening’ she told him. ‘I was hanging onto every single word.’
Marin frowned at her in amusement. She was a playful character, though it wasn’t always obvious when she was making fun of you.
‘In any case’ Mystery said turning to face the brothers again, ‘the sun is rising. The shops will be opening soon. Shouldn’t we be going out soon?’
Mystery and the five brothers slept at strange hours, and some nights didn’t even sleep at all. This night just passed had been one of those nights. None of the six had slept a wink, instead staying up to play board games and reach one another stories, but none of them were tired.
‘You're right’ Earnest said running his hands down his face and stretching. ‘We should go now if we want to avoid the crowds.’
‘Come on then’ Reynolds sighed rising to his feet and clapping loudly, speaking mostly to Jerry and Demetrius still sitting. ‘Get a move on. We have things to do today.’
Jerry and Demetrius got gingerly to their feet, having sat in the same seat for a long while, their muscles were stiff.
‘Why don’t you hurry up and put your coats on?’ Marin suggested none too casually.
The other brothers in the room paused only to give him level glances, before quietly obeying. Filing out the room and closing the door behind them, the other brothers left Marin and Mystery alone together.
Marin let out a steady sigh, shoulders slumped, before turning back to face Mystery.
‘It gets difficult having so many brothers sometimes’ he told her. ‘I wonder some days how I cope.’
‘It must be hard for you’ Mystery replied dryly. ‘I would not know. I have never had any siblings.’
He smiled warmly at her, taking a step closer. Mystery raised her head as he did so.
He kissed her, pressing his lips tenderly against hers as he pushed her gently back against the bookshelf behind her. She smiled as she kissed him back, before pushing him away gently and beaming up at him, eyes shining.
‘Come on’ she whispered playfully into his ear. ‘We don’t want to keep the others waiting.’
He frowned at her, stepping back.
She offered her hand to him and he took it, together they walked across the room and into the next, letting go of each other when they reached the entrance hall.
The others were already waiting outside. Marin put his waistcoat on, and Mystery did the same with her own velvet coat, reaching for her shoes and putting them on, smart and dark in colour like the rest of what she wore, they had a little heel and a buckle at the side.
‘Ready?’ Marin asked her happily.
She straightened, looking him in the eye.

‘Ready’ she said.
He opened the front door for her and she stepped outside, dipping her head to him as she went. Outside the others were waiting for them.
‘I see Mystery didn’t allow you to be distracted for too long’ Earnest commented with a sly grin.
‘Hurry up’ Demetrius called to all them, holding open the door of the carriage that waited for them and ushering them all inside. ‘We haven’t got all day. The driver charges by the minute you know.’
The others quickly obliged, Mystery was the last to get into the carriage, pausing only to allow the little dog that lived outside their property to jump into the carriage after them before closing the door. No one really owned this dog, it had simply decided one day that it lived on their front step, and followed them around from time to time. It was a little Yorkshire Terrier; it had no name, though Mystery was quite fond of it.
‘All of use ready?’ Reynolds asked with amusement as the little dog curled up on the floor beneath Mystery’s skirt.
She grinned back at him, curling a strand of her loose black hair around her finger.
‘Ready when you are’ she said teasingly back at him.
Reynolds leant back frowning at her as beside him Earnest banged on the roof of the carriage, calling out to the driver to get going.
They heard the snap of the reins, then the carriage jolted into motion.
Their journey was mostly silent as they went; it was only a short trip along the road to the large town where they headed. Their home was on the outskirts of the town, but all that they needed was in the centre. It was fairly quiet around the neighbourhood in which they lived, but it never slept.
Mystery loved it here, and as she glanced out of the window to a group of young children playing in the grey streets outside the carriage, she felt Marin touch her hand.
She smiled, clasping his hand tightly in hers. She did not look at him, but she heard him sigh contently; felt him lean slightly closer to her.
She was happy here.

They reached the town centre a few minutes later. Mystery heard the calling of a young boy on a street corner selling papers. She opened the window of the carriage, leaning out and calling back to him.
He saw her, jogging alongside the carriage to keep up with her as she reached for her pocket, pulling out a single coin and tossing it to him. The boy caught it happily, throwing back to her one of the rolled up papers.
Mystery caught the paper in the air, stepping back and closing the carriage window. She sat in her seat, leaning back comfortably as she untied the string that held the paper together.
‘I wish you would stop doing that’ Marin said to her disapprovingly.
‘What?’
‘Reaching out the window like that’ he frowned, crossing his arms. ‘It’s very unlady-like.’
Mystery gave him an amused look, tilting her head sceptically at him, a strand of her black hair fell over her shoulder.

‘I need to do this’ Mystery spoke calmly in her defence. ‘I need to read about what's happening in our world.’
Marin leant forwards silently, resting his elbows on his knees and weaving his fingers together.
‘Is there something that is troubling you?’ Reynolds spoke up.
‘Of course there is’ Mystery replied, scanning the pages before her. ‘How could I not be afraid?’
‘Nothing is going to happen’ Demetrius said gazing out of the window.
‘That is where you are wrong’ Mystery replied.
He glanced at her curiously, though kept silent.
‘Do you know something we don’t know?’ Reynolds asked her.
‘Not specifically’ Mystery replied. ‘I am just afraid.’
The carriage stopped shortly after. Mystery folded up the newspaper, leaving it behind on the seat within the carriage while the five brothers exited before her.
Marin turned, offering his arm out for her to take.
She beamed back at him as she took it, accepting his help as he led her from the carriage. She stepped out onto the cold hard street, the little terrier leaping out after her.
Jerry closed the door of the carriage behind her as Earnest paid the driver who went along his way.
‘So, where do we go first?’ Mystery asked as the six of them gathered together in the street.
‘This town is far too busy for my liking’ Earnest complained, glancing off to the side at the people around them.
‘Well in that case why don’t we split up to do what we need, then we can get home faster’ Mystery suggested happily.
‘Excellent idea’ Marin said, ‘Mystery, Jerry and I will get the medicine’ he said as beside him Mystery rolled her eyes in amusement. Of course he wanted to stay by her side.
‘Fine’ Demetrius sighed, ‘I will go with Reynolds and Earnest to get the food. Then do we meet back here?’
‘Yes, let’s do that’ Marin smiled.
‘Good’ Demetrius grumbled, ‘the sooner we do this the sooner we get back.’
The group split in two and each side walked their separate ways, to meet back about half an hour or so later.
‘So did you see anything interesting in the paper on the way here?’ Marin asked Mystery politely as she held onto his arm.
Before them Jerry walked a little ahead.
‘Yes’ Mystery said. The paused, gazing about her briefly before continuing. ‘The news sources say there is strife in this area, and that the foreign queen who arrived out of thin air with her army is targeting this town. Our king is fighting to stop her.’
They slowed to a stop at the edge of the road as they waited for a carriage to go by. Around them the streets were busy, and the town never fully rested, being busy even at night. Now, families walked about, couples, individuals, groups of friends, all happy and talking or rushing to be somewhere. In a small patch of green separated by iron fencing was a small park with benches and trees were people played games and ate their picnics.
‘Fighting?’ Marin questioned her. ‘It seems pretty calm to me.’

‘Don’t be fooled’ Mystery told him quickly. ‘Appearances can be deceiving, and things are not always as they seem.’
Marin tilted his head at her, giving her a strange look.
‘Do you know something I don’t? I feel as if there is something hidden in you somewhere.’
‘You’ve been saying that since you first found me’ Mystery answered without pause.
‘Yes’ Marin replied, ‘and it is now more truer than ever.’
Ahead of them Jerry stepped forwards onto the road, leading the way as he crossed onto the next street. Marin and Mystery followed them.
‘Here we are’ Jerry said as they reached the pharmacy. ‘Are you coming in?’ he asked Marin who was waving to someone down the street.
‘It’s my old friend’ Marin said.
‘Well go and say hello then.’
Marin turned to Mystery.
‘I’ll get the medicine with Jerry’ Mystery prompted. ‘You see your friend quickly, then we can meet with the others and go home. Go on’ she hastened again as Marin hesitated, ‘I’ll be alright without you for a few minutes’ she said turning away and following Jerry into the store. ‘I promise you, now go.’
He nodded to her quickly, before turning away and pacing towards his friend.
Mystery’s attention lingered on him for a moment, smiling as she stood in the doorway of the shop holding the door open.
She turned and walked into the shop. The bell signalling the entrance of customers rang above them, and Mystery raised her head, seeing the pharmacist coming from the room around back.
‘Hello’ he smiled welcomingly. ‘How can I help?’
Mystery waited quietly by the door as Jerry stepped forwards to talk to the man who stood behind the counter. Behind the pharmacist were shelves and shelves filled with medicines in bottles of various colours with labels of various colours.
As Jerry spoke to the man, Mystery’s attention drifted back to the window beside her, and she stared out into the peaceful streets.
It was pleasant outside, a tranquil scene as people went about their business.
Mystery eyes slipped out of focus as she watched. The day was bright, and the sky a periwinkle blue.
Everything was beautiful.
But Mystery suddenly noticed something then. A small group of figures were moving quickly in the street, moving spread wide apart and all heading towards the same location, one of the buildings that appeared to be a home, where the front door opened out right onto the street.
Mystery focused on this spot, narrowing her eyes. She was only vaguely aware of Jerry speaking to her, but he sounded far away, almost as if he were underwater.
‘Mystery? Mystery. Are you alright? What's wrong?’
Mystery caught the briefest glimpse of Marin on the other side of the street, before the explosion went off.
There was a deafening bang as Mystery stumbled; the ground shaking like an earthquake had just struck as the entire shop trembled. And then instantly after this there came the sound of

falling rubble from the explosion as rocks flew in all directions, followed by an eerie silence that lasted only seconds.
And then the panic struck.
People screamed, running from the area.
Mystery was pulled to side. She was only aware that it was Jerry who was dragging her when they were out on the streets. Mystery stared in shock as she saw soldiers swarm the area, all heading to the building that was now utterly destroyed. There were only a few walls standing now, and a hollow in the centre where the ground floor had collapsed into a large cellar that had been beneath.
There were gunshots and hollering. Mystery caught the glimpse of two figures fleeing the scene through the rubble, she saw their silhouettes. A male figure, and a female figure, one unnaturally tall and skinny, with very long hair that trailed after her like a banner.
'What…?' she breathed.
'Mystery come on!' Jerry called, pulling her back.
Mystery turned and ran with Jerry, heading in the other direction from where the fighting was happening.
They were unable to escape however; as they found that the entire area was surrounded.
'What is going on here?' Jerry demanded.
'Keep back' the soldier said to him, as Mystery glanced behind them, back the way they had come.
'I demand an explanation for this' Jerry told the man bravely.
'Don't make me kill you.'
Mystery turned back to the man, still clinging to Jerry.
She released him.
'You're a foreign soldier' Mystery said to him calmly.
The soldier began to grow angry, he moved forward to strike her, but Mystery was ready, catching his wrist in the air to stop him.
'You're one of the men that came here from the other kingdom' she said to him, 'the one in which the king has died…the one in which his queen in now in charge…'
The soldier jerked his hand back from Mystery's grasp, his fist shooting out again and punching her hard in the gut.
Mystery doubled over.
There was a struggle. Something happened, and the last that Mystery knew, was that she was lying on the floor.
She woke up some unknown time later, her body stiff from lying in the hard street.
Mystery pushed herself up groaning, finding Jerry beside her.
'Mystery, thank god you're alright!'
'What happened?' she grumbled, hand going to her head.
'You just collapsed' Jerry replied, taking her by the hand and pulling her to her feet.
'Who were those people that ran from the building?' Mystery asked him, body hunched over.
'I saw no one.'
Mystery tensed slightly, grasping her head.
Her hand relaxed then, and she raised her chin, looking up at him. She straightened.

‘Where is Marin?’ she mumbled. ‘He was in the streets when…..’ she struggled to remember. ‘He went to meet his friend…oh god…no…’ she said realised. ‘Please tell me he is alright….’
‘I don’t know’ Jerry shook his head.
‘And Earnest?’ she asked. ‘Reynolds and Demetrius?’
‘I don’t know’ Jerry said again, placing his arm around her. ‘Come on.’
‘Where are we going?’
‘We’re going home.’
‘But the others….?’
‘Home is where they will meet us’ Jerry spoke encouragingly to her. ‘It would be difficult to find them in the town…and home is where it is safest.’
Mystery nodded unhappily at this, allowing herself to be led back through the town, walking slowly as they headed to its edge.
She glanced around her. The streets were far quieter than they were before, but although there were still a few people still outside, there were no foreign soldiers in sight. Instead, every corner was guarded by an imposing figure armed and armoured, and wearing the crest of the king in this kingdom, their king.
‘What happened?’ Mystery grumbled. ‘Where are the men….?’
‘The foreign queen’s army has attacked this town’ Jerry answered quietly. ‘Our king has protected us. They had been chased off…they were only few in number.’
‘What were they doing here?’ Mystery whispered.
‘I don’t know.’
‘There were two figures in the rubble’ she whimpered. ‘I saw them…did *you* see them?’
He dipped his head slightly as he turned to face her, holding her firmly as they walked.
‘No’ he said to her. ‘You’ve already asked me that.’
‘I'm sorry…’ she said to him. ‘I've forgotten.’
‘It’s ok’ he said. ‘We’re going home now. The others will be there waiting for us.’
One of the soldiers bearing the crest of their king stepped forward, ordering them to stop. He spoke harshly, though was not intimidating, not like the other soldier they had faced before.
He searched both of them, allowing them to go on their way once he was satisfied. The pair was searched numerous times as they headed to the edge of the town. But before they got there, a figure called out to them.
‘Mystery! Jerry!’
They both looked around. Mystery’s expression broke into a smile at the sight of Marin jogging towards her. Behind him were Earnest, Reynolds and Demetrius.
‘Thank heavens your both alright’ Marin said, sweeping Mystery up in his arms and beaming at Jerry over her shoulder, ‘for a moment I feared the worst.’
The six of them were united again, and they stood in a circle facing inwards.
Mystery was the first to speak.
‘Did any of you see the two figures run through the streets?’ she asked them. ‘A man and a very tall, skinny woman.’
‘No’ Demetrius spoke to her. ‘We saw nothing of the sort; we were a long way away from what happened. We only heard about it after it was over.’
‘And you?’ Mystery said to Marin.

He frowned at her.
‘I saw simply lucky’ he said to her. ‘Incredibly lucky, for I was close to the event…but…’ he sighed, ‘I saw nothing but the soldiers and the panic.’
‘Why do you keep asking about them?’ Jerry wondered aloud. ‘What is so important about them to you?’
‘I don’t know…’ Mystery spoke meekly, bowing her head, her black hair falling around her face. ‘I just feel…I feel….’
The others waited on her word, wondering what she would say.
‘I feel….’ Mystery said, ‘*something*…she finished.’

That night, Mystery lay in bed, unable to sleep. She lay on her back, staring at the dark night’s sky through the window.
The stars shone brightly in the murky cosmos above, so far away from everything she knew, a different place, so peaceful and quiet.
Beside her in the bed, Marin began to shift. He turned to her, sighing heavily.
‘You're still awake.’
‘Yes’ she answered meekly.
He sat rose, propped up on his pillow, he lay on his side watching her.
‘You're thinking about those figures again aren’t you?’
‘Is it so obvious?’ she asked him.
‘I'm afraid it is.’
She turned to face him, head resting back on the pillow, her black hair splayed about her.
‘I fear’ she told him. ‘I fear for the future. I sense a dark presence approaching.’
‘What are you talking about?’
She turned away again, looking back towards the window.
‘I cannot explain. I feel something in my heart.’
Marin watched her uncertainly, gazing down at her slender profile as she lay upon the bed, naked beneath the thin white sheet.
It was a warm night tonight.
He reached out to her, touching her chin lightly and turning her head to face his. She blinked at him, staring up with dark eyes.
‘You're so beautiful’ he said to her.
Mystery smiled.
He leant down to kiss her; his touch was soft and tender.
Mystery turned her head to the side, looking back towards the window as he trailed kissed down her neck and shoulders.
She drew a slow and deep breath as he leant fully over her, moving his leg over so that she was fully beneath him.
Marin stayed there on all fours for a moment, simply looking down at her.
Mystery turned away from the window again, staring into his face.
She smiled, and he smiled in return.
She reached up to him, hugging him around the neck, as he pulled the sheet from between them, exposing her naked body fully under his.

He bore down on her, their bare flesh touching as they began to kiss again.
She tilted her head, running her fingers through his hair as he reached for her, parting her legs gently.
He was always so careful with her, his touch so tender, for he truly loved her with all his heart.
The groaned as he reached for her, pushing forwards.
He pulled the cover back over them, hand winding around her thigh.
He kissed her again, as Mystery held him tighter to her.

Afterwards they lay still on the bed. Mystery lay on her back, staring at the window, through which the nights sky shone brightly with stars.
Beside her Marin was resting, she thought that he was most likely asleep.
What is this I feel in my heart? Mystery stared transfixed towards the window, and the world beyond. *It's like a feel something out there…calling to me…*
She glanced towards Marin briefly, before looking back at the window.
She rose from the bed, taking her nightgown that hung from the hook on the wall. Dressing quickly, she stepped lightly across the wooden floor, opening the window fully and allowing the chill to sweep into the room.
It was a cold night, but Mystery felt none of the icy touch.
She climbed carefully forwards onto the window sill, grasping the edges firmly and looking down at the soft grass in the garden at her feet.
Mystery spared one last glanced back towards Marin, before leaping out of the window, and landing heavily on the ground.
Mystery rose gingerly, the bones in her legs aching from the fall. She forced herself to straighten up, standing tall as she stared across the open plains, and towards the town near the home in which she lived.
She ran, barefoot across the grass, heading in a straight line, heading straight for the town, where the beacon that only she could feel, shone brightly, calling out to her.

It was a few hours later, when Marin woke.
He wasn't sure what had caused him to stir, perhaps it was his subconscious telling him there was something wrong, for when he turned over in the bed, he found that Mystery was not there beside him.
Feeling a little worried, he got out of bed, searching the house to try to look for her. When he could not find her, he woke his brothers. Earnest, Jerry, Reynolds and Demetrius.
Shortly after, they all gathered in the kitchen.
'Do we have cause to be worried?' Demetrius asked.
'I don't think so' Marin replied, 'but I feel concerned all the same.'
'Of course you do' Demetrius nodded.
'I would like to go look for her.'
'But where has she gone?' Jerry asked. 'It's the middle of the night?'
'I think I might know' Marin answered sombrely, 'though I do not know why?'
'Then tell us.'

‘Since the other day, she has been acting rather peculiarly’ Marin told the others. ‘She seemed to be transfixed on the town, unable to take her mind off it.’
‘I have noticed the same thing recently’ Jerry said. ‘So you think she has gone to the town?’
‘I believe she might have’ Marin nodded. ‘I would like to go there’ he said, ‘now…to look for her. I want to make sure she is safe.’
‘I think we would all want the same’ Reynolds agreed. ‘We’ll all go out to look for her. Do you have any idea specifically where she might have gone?’ he asked Marin.
‘No’ he shook his head. ‘But I'm sure she has gone to the town somewhere.’
‘It’ll be ok’ Earnest told him. ‘We will find her.’
Marin stepped back, bowing his head and staring at the floor suddenly, gritting his teeth.
‘Let’s go then’ he said. ‘I want to leave as soon as possible.’

Chapter Fifty Two
Dying Flower

The town was far to go on foot, and by the time Mystery reached it, sunlight was touching the horizon.
Her feet and legs were icy cold from running through the damp tall grasses of the plains, but at long last, out of breath and shaking from exhaustion, she touched the cobbled stone streets of the town.
The few people that were up and about this early in the morning gave her a few peculiar looks, being dressed and in the state of exhaustion that she was, with her black hair unkempt. But she did not notice these stares. Now it was like she had tunnel-vision, and all she could see, was the beacon.
Mystery padded forwards, her nightdress damp with sweat, she headed towards the centre of the town, from which the signal was calling to her.
What is it? She asked herself over and over again, repeating this mantra in her head. *What is it?*

When she reached the centre of the town, she found what she was looking for; she found the beacon that had been burning, a signal that had been calling out to her and her alone.
It was a girl.
The most distinct thing about her, was her height and her slender build. Even sitting down, it was clear that she was abnormally tall, despite having such a young face.
She was in fact just fifteen years old.
Her skin was pale and her eyes sunken. She had hair that was pale green and was incredibly long, growing past her ankles; it was pooled on the pavement at her feet.
She turned to face Mystery as she stood there, transfixed.
The strange girl smiled.
And then she spoke.
‘Lilith’ she said. ‘It’s good to see you.’

‘Lilith? Is that my name?’
‘It is’ Ena replied, ‘and you are not the person you believe you are.’
Behind Ena, another figure appeared then, stepping forwards into view.
His hair was like pure silver, and with eyes to match. He had a wise expression about him, and stood tall when he walked. He was an incredibly handsome man in the prime of his life.
‘Do you know us?’ Ena spoke aloud, at the man stopped beside her, facing ahead. ‘Do you know who we are?’
‘Jaspin? And Ena!’ she gasped. ‘…I *do* know you.’
Her hands clapped to her mouth then, and her body hunched over.
Ena rose, towering over Jaspin beside her.
‘I did this to you’ Ena began, ‘to protect you.’
A memory flashed in her mind then, a painful one.

He kicked her and beat her, cracking her head against the rock and stamping on her leg, breaking her bones.
Lilith cried out in agony, begging him to stop. But he did not listen.
She crawled on her belly towards the light at the end of the tunnel, fingernails scratching at the rock as she dragged herself forwards, the blood on her face mixed with tears as she cried.

Lilith stopped moving, resting on the edge of the cliff with an arm dangling over the drop.
‘Are you just going to give up?’ the assassin asked her. ‘Is there no fight left in you?’
‘Kill me….’ she wheezed through broken teeth. ‘Do not toy with me….just…kill me if you must…I am ready to accept my end…’
She heard the sound of the assassin drawing his sword from his sheath, the ring of the metal a final note that hung in the air.
She closed her eyes tight shut, waiting for the long thin blade to pierce her body. The suspense was unbearable. But even after many seconds, nothing happened.
‘What are you waiting for?!’ Lilith pleaded. ‘Just do it….please!’

It was unclear exactly what had happened after that, whether or not she had deliberately stepped off the cliff, or had fallen by accident. But when Jaspin glanced to where she had been after he had overpowered and killed the assassin, he found that she was not there.

The illusion suddenly melted away, the old scars returned to her face, her black hair turned back to white, as all her memories came flooding back to her. It was as if masses of water held back by a dam had suddenly broken free, and she felt all the pain and fear and sorrow she had felt in the past, magnified tenfold, as she remembering everything that had happened, as she remembered….
She screamed then, clutching at her head as she felt a physical pain within her.
She began to sob hysterically.
‘Aski…..!’ she howled. ‘Reuben ….and Gael! They are all dead….all gone!’
Her head shot up suddenly, as she stared fixated at Ena.

‘You feel different’ she sobbed, unable to see her clearly through her teary eyes, blinking rapidly the tears rolled down her cheek. ‘I know who you are’ Lilith continued to cry, ‘you are the same person as before….the earth maiden….but something is different about you….something wrong.’
‘We angels are unable to touch Ena’ Jaspin began sombrely. ‘She has been cursed.’
‘It’s more than that’ Lilith balled her fists, her bottom lip trembling. ‘I can feel it….’ she cried openly now. ‘Ena is……..*dying*……’

Interlude

Outside, Ena weaved between the many pools that surrounded the small temple, trailing her long slender fingers along the low walls, feeling the cool touch of the water that splashed her pale skin lightly.
She raised her head then, seeing one of the holy figures, recognising him instantly by his loosely fitting purple robes. The man smiled kindly at her.
‘Hello traveller’ he said to her. ‘You must have travelled a long way to get here.’
‘Yes’ Ena spoke quietly, ‘I have.’
The holy figure bowed his head, sweeping his hand over the water of the pool between them. Unbeknown to Ena however, as he did this, the tiny vial he concealed beneath his sleeve tipped its clear contents into the water, polluting it.
The holy figure smiled to Ena again.
‘Drink’ he said. ‘The water here is blessed. It will make you strong again.’
Ena bowed her head to the clear water, rippling before her as the fountain nearby rained constantly into the pool.
Ena reached into the pool, her fingers touching the water that instantly soothed her skin.
She cupped her hands before her, collecting the water between her palms. The holy figure opposite her, kneeling on the other side of the pool watched quietly as Ena lifted her hands to her lips, drinking deeply the water that trickled down her neck and arms.
‘It’s refreshing’ she breathed, lowering her hands.
She tensed then, body hunched over, hands pressed to her heart.
‘What have you done to me?’ she shuddered.
The holy figure before her tilted his head.
‘The angels will never be able to touch you again.’
A shadow fell over him then, and the holy figure still kneeling before the pool, turned calmly to the figure that stood behind him.
It was Jaspin, behind him a step back was Lilith.
Jaspin’s expression was furious; his chest rose and fell sharply as he breathed deeply. But the man before him stared back with a calm expression.
Jaspin cast his hand out in one sweep, using his magic to slit the man’s throat. The holy man fell to the side; body slumped as he bled profusely into the pool, quickly staining the water red.
Jaspin quickly circled the pool, grasping Ena by her shoulders and hauling her to her feet.

‘What has he done to you?’ he snapped.
But something in Ena’s expression suddenly changed.
‘Get off me! Don’t touch me!’
‘Ena?’
‘I don’t know who you are!’ she screamed.
‘Oh not this again…’
‘Jaspin!’ Lilith called to him and he turned, his heart freezing in his chest at the sight of archers on the rooftops all around them. ‘They’ve found us!’ Lilith cried.

It was shortly after that, that Lilith was separated from Jaspin and Ena, she fled with Gael through the passages underground, Gael was killed by the assassin that hunted them down, and Lilith was forced to flee, followed closely by the madman who began to toy with her.
Jaspin had come to the rescue, but it was already too late. Lilith had fallen from the cliff. It was only against staggering odds, that the fall did not kill her.

Lilith lay on her side in agony.
The bones in her body where broken, and she knew instinctively by the way her chest pained her with each breath, that her ribs were broken too.
She shifted just the tiniest fraction, experiencing the most horrific pain she had ever endured.
Even this tiny movement was enough to cause her deep discomfort, and as she wretched, she saw blood had come from her mouth.
I have to get up Lilith thought furiously to herself, crying out in torment as she forced herself to stand, feeling sick and dizzy at the pain. *I have to be strong…*
Her body trembled violently, but hunched over, she managed to bring herself to her feet, her arms numb and feeling as heavy as lead hung limply at her sides as she trembled on the spot, in danger of falling over again.
She grimaced, gritting her teeth and squeezing her eyes tight shut, willing the pain to go away.
Its only in the mind…its only in the mind…its only in the mind…
She opened her eyes suddenly, raising her head slowly she saw a figure before her.
‘Ena!’ she gasped.
Ena had come out from her hiding place where Jaspin had left her, and come here now to find Lilith in this state.
‘I am myself again’ Ena spoke. ‘That holy man has killed me, but I am myself again for a short time.’
Lilith blinked slowly at her, the earth maiden’s words not sinking in.
‘They are coming’ Ena breathed, tilting her head to the side ever so slightly as she glanced one way. ‘They will kill you if they find you.’
Ena looked back to Lilith, who was barely able to listen to her words, every ounce of her will and concentration was placed now into trying to stand.

‘They will know you by your white hair’ Ena went on, raising an arm and summoning her magic to her. ‘You will forget about me…until we meet again.’
Ena threw her arm forwards, sending the spell shooting towards Lilith.
Lilith screamed in pain as the spell hit her with the force of a solid rock falling through the air.
She fell back and hit her head again, the white instantly seeping from her scalp, to be replaced with black.
She lost consciousness, laying on the floor utterly exposed.
By the time the soldiers arrived, they completely dismissed her, paying her no attention.
‘She’s not the one we’re looking for’ one of them said. ‘The angel we seek has white hair and a scar on her face.’
The illusion Ena had placed on Lilith held well, and shortly after, she was picked up by five brothers who came across her by chance and brought her home to care for her.
The one named Marin spent the longest with her, sitting by her bed and brushing her black hair out of her face.
‘What happened to you?’ he asked her sleeping figure.
The next morning she woke, with no memory of who she was, or how she had received her injuries.
She had forgotten everything in her past, including her own name.
Marin had smiled upon her as she thanked him for their kindness in taking her in.
‘What a mystery you are’ he had said to her.

Chapter Fifty Three
Ashes in the Courtyard

Lilith regained herself. She suddenly stopped crying, and straightened up slowly, holding her hands together before her.
Everything she had thought she had, the life she had thought she remembered, it has all been false. It had all been a lie, deliberately planted in her by magic, by Ena. To save her.
‘I know who I am’ she spoke calmly. ‘My name is Lilith, and I have been rejected all my life by so many people, because of what I am.’
Jaspin bowed his head slightly, his attention fixed on Lilith, as she closed her eyes.
From her back her wings grew, unfurling.
But they were not as she had known them.
Jaspin could not maintain a calm demeanour, he could not keep the fear and horror from his face, however Ena beside him remained impassive.
Lilith felt her own fear at Jaspin’s reaction, and she looked at her own wings.
She had lost half of her feathers, which were no longer the pure white they had once been, but now a filthy grey, and the feathers that had remained were broken, torn and falling apart.

Some were so badly damaged, that they would simply disintegrate if touched, like the dried petals of a dead flower.
Lilith was dying.
The sickness had reached her at last.
Lilith felt a sudden lump in her throat, her heart skiped a beat, as she stared up at herself, her wings, which were now so foreign to her.
She turned slowly away from them, facing ahead again, and forcing herself to be controlled.
Lilith bowed her head, closing her eyes and letting out a slow sigh, before opening them and facing Jaspin and Ena again.
And then a voice called out to her.
'Mystery!'
She glanced to the side, only expressing mild surprise, at seeing Marin standing there at the edge of the street, surrounded by his four brothers.
They all looked shocked at what they saw, learning at last what this person really was.
'Marin' Lilith spoke sadly, turning towards him as he jogged up to her.
He slowed to a stop, pausing to glance up at her wings, before meeting her eye again.
'Your hair…' he breathed, 'its black…and….how did you get that scar on your face?' His eyes softened then, and there was sadness there. 'Mystery…'
'No' she answered shortly. 'The person you thought you knew does not exist. My name is Lilith, and this is what I am, a usurper, a betrayer of god…who has no place in heaven or on earth.'
'You are still the woman I love.'
'No' Lilith said again. 'That life was a lie, and I do not love you.'
He looked as if she had suddenly slapped him.
'How….' He stammered, blinking back tears in his eyes, 'how could you say that?'
'I thank you for everything you have done for me' Lilith told him evenly, speaking completely without emotion. 'But I am not who you thought I was.'
'Lilith!'
She turned to face Jaspin now.
'They will find us soon' Jaspin prompted. 'They are already closing in on our location.'
Lilith heard his words, and thought very carfully before she spoke.
'The mountain' she breathed. 'We have to reach that paradise…where all this will end.'
Jaspin shook his head.
'I cannot touch Ena' he told her, voice breaking. 'That holy man has put a curse on her, and we angels can no longer touch her. We are going to fail, if we don't reach that mountain…but the only way is by sky.'
Lilith raised her head slightly, eyes wide.
'She is dying' Jaspin said. 'Her mind is falling apart.'
'I know a way' Marin spoke up, as the brothers around him approached slowly. 'There is still a way to reach the heart of the volcano of which you speak, a passage underground.'
Lilith regarded him.
'Why would you want to help us?'
'I don't care what you say' Marin replied with determination, 'you are still the woman I love…but now I understand you a lot better.'

There was a call in the distance, and a horn sounded then.
'They are closing in on our location' Jaspin said. 'Lilith, we have to get out of here.'
'Follow me' Marin spoke hastily, 'I know a place where they will not find you.'
'You could die if you try to help us' Lilith hissed angrily, spurred by a sudden wave of emotions within her she did not expect.
'I don't care' Marin answered, speaking quietly. 'Mystery….Lilith…I still love you, and I will do whatever I can to help you.'
She gritted her teeth, balling her fists.
Lilith turned back to Jaspin then, speaking.
'Jaspin I….I cannot withdraw my wings.'
Ena jogged up to the pair, giving them both a calm expression, she even smiled.
'Come on' she said to the both of them, her long pale green hair dragging on the floor. 'We don't want to be caught by the hunters now do we?' she giggled.
The brothers stared at her, slightly fazed by her unusual appearance, the unnaturally skinny body and height, despite the fact that she was clearly much younger than any of them, she was the tallest by far.
'It'll be like a game' Ena persisted. 'You love games don't you?' she asked Lilith.
'Yes Ena' Lilith answered. 'I love games.'
Marin hesitated, dipping his head slightly and stepping back.
'It's this way' he said, as another horn sounded, this one much closer. 'Follow me.'
Ena ran after Marin as he made his way quickly in the opposite direction, Jaspin paused as he reached Lilith, embracing her tightly as the other brothers lingered in confusion and uncertainty, before they made their way after Marin and the slender green-haired girl.
'Lilith' Jaspin breathed into her ear as she held him back. 'I'm so glad we are together again.'
'Jaspin…'
He grasped her harder, holding her tightly as if afraid to let go, as if fearing that if he did, he would lose her again.
'I'm sorry…' was all that Jaspin was able to say. '…I'm sorry.'
She pushed him firmly back so that she could look into his face.
'Thank you for finding me' she said to him.
His expression turned serious then, and he turned sharply away from her, marching in the direction the others had gone.
'Come on' he barked sharply, driven suddenly by a will to succeed in their goal, and a determination to survive. 'Let's not waste time.'
Lilith ran to catch up with him, and the trail of people that made up the unusual band, the five brothers, and earth maiden and two angels, headed onwards.
Marin led the way, moving hastily. They came to a narrow street that turned this way and that.
'This is dangerous' Lilith called after him as she followed at the back of the line. 'We are heading right to them, they will find me! I cannot hide my wings.'
'It's alright' Marin spoke quickly back at her without pause. 'We are nearly there.'
They came to the end of the alleyway where Marin froze suddenly, hiding back around the corner he had just stepped out of and waiting for a group of enemy soldiers to pass them by.
They were so close.

Behind him, the others waited nervously; the brothers were utterly silent, casting strange glances towards the peculiar figures that accompanied them.
'Alright' Marin said when the soldiers were out of sight. 'It's just in here.'
He stepped quickly forward, opening a door for the others. They all slipped in without hesitation or question, Marin glancing behind him towards the open street beyond the narrow alley as he held the door open, before moving in after them, closing the door with a snap, and locking it from the inside.

The room inside was dark and empty. The brothers hung back around the door, while and angels and Ena moved forwards and began to explore.
'A toy room' Jaspin mumbled, reaching out and picking up a wooden figure of a toy soldier and glancing up towards Marin. 'This is a toymakers shop?'
'My friend used to own it' Marin answered quietly. 'He died recently due to complications, it's my shop now.'
'How does this help us?' Jaspin asked him, putting the toy back down. 'If we are trapped here, it's only a matter of time before they find us.'
'Don't worry' Marin said. 'My friend had his own water supply.'
'A water supply?' Jaspin echoed glancing back towards the man as Ena beside him began to play with a few of the toys.
'Oh no' Lilith groaned before Marin had the chance to speak. 'You mean a well?'
Just like the one I was thrown down before in the temple. She bowed her head. *I remember…*
'You can escape the town through there' Marin indicated the well in the corner of the room. 'They will still mostly likely find you, but at least this way you get a head start.'
'Why are you doing this?' Jaspin asked suspiciously, narrowing his eyes and stepping close to the man. Behind him Ena turned towards them. 'Why would you want to help us?' Jaspin asked.
'I've said already' Marin answered, turning his gaze towards Lilith. 'I will do anything for the one I love, even if it means that will take her away from me.'
'Marin' Lilith spoke evenly, her voice level and patient. 'I am not the person you thought me to be, just look at what I am.'
Marin tilted his head back to look upon her colossal wings, now a sorry state to the glory they had once been.
'I see only the woman I knew before' he answered, as men began to call in the streets outside. 'Mystery….Lilith…I will never stop loving you.'
Jaspin watched the pair as they stared at one another, grimacing as he heard the voices.
'Hurry' he snapped. 'We cannot waste time. We must escape.'
Lilith turned quickly away from Marin, heading over to the well.
'I thank you for everything you have done' Lilith mumbled. 'But I cannot see you again after this.'
'I am coming with you.'
'What?'
'Hurry, we don't have time to waste' Jaspin hissed, as Ena beside him grabbed a nearby rope hanging from the wall, tied it to one of the metal pipes nearby and threw the other end down the well.

She went in first.
Jaspin grasped the cold stone wall of the well as he watched her sail down, seeing her descend into the darkness, heard her draw a sharp intake of breath as her body sunk into the icy water below.
'Are you alright?' he called down to her.
'Yes' she quickly replied, 'but please hurry!'
'Lilith' Jaspin said extending a hand out to her.
She took it, and climbed over the wall and tucking to her body the broken wings she wore.
'You'll be alright' Jaspin told her quietly, as she held onto the rope, their eyes locking for the briefest moment. 'I will follow last' Jaspin said, 'now go.'
Lilith gave a quick nod, before lowering herself into the well, climbing down the rope carefully.
She joined Ena in the water, who giggled at her, but said nothing.
'And you' Jaspin said, turning to Marin then with a glare. 'You want to follow after her?'
'Y-yes' he said, hesitating for only a split second.
Jaspin kept his distance as he approached, climbing over the wall and grasping tightly the rope as he lowered himself down.
'Your name' Jaspin spoke suddenly, 'what is it?'
'Marin' he said, before Jaspin quickly turned away, falling silent.
He climbed down the rope, and was out of sight.
'And you?' Jaspin said to the four remaining brothers now. 'What will you do?'
There was a sudden bang on the door from which they had entered, and the muffled voice of a man calling out to them.
'Open up! We know you're in there!'
'Oh heck' Jerry panicked, taking a step back.
'It's alright' Reynolds voiced hastily as they all stared at the door. 'It's locked. They can't get in.'
There was suddenly a much louder bang from the door, like the sound a battering ram hitting the wood.
'It won't hold for long' Jaspin hissed, 'I don't know what they will do to you if they find you here' he spoke to the brothers.
'Let's go!' Demetrius said moving over to the well.
'You want to get us caught up in this?!' Earnest objected, as Jaspin moved to stand before the door, his black and white wings unfurling from his back, as he summoned his magic to him, releasing it to its full extent.
'We don't have a choice' Demetrius answered flatly, 'now hurry.'
Jaspin tensed as there came another bang from the door, the hinges shook, as he listened to the sounds of movement behind him, as the remaining brothers one by one climbed down into the well.
Go! He thought desperately in his mind. *Get as far away from here as you can!*
The battering ram hit one last time, and the door crashed open as wood splinters rained into the room.
Jaspin attacked the moment he saw an opening, killing the first man before the splintered wood had even fallen to the floor.

He fought alone.

The water in the river that ran beneath the building was icy cold. The current was gentle, but the others swam quickly downstream to escape their pursuers.
'Where is Jaspin?' Lilith gasped, struggling to keep her head above water, as the feathers of her wings soaking up the water, threatened to drag her down.
'He's fighting the others' Ernest replied hastily. 'They have broken through the door.'
'We haven't the time to stop' Marin said to them, 'we have to keep going.'
Lilith hesitated only briefly, tilting her head back to the light that shone through the top of the well, before turning in the water and swimming ahead.
A short while later the seven of them reached a rocky shore. The five brothers climbed out of the water, Demetrius turned to help Ena clamber to her feet, and Marin moved towards Lilith who was last to follow, grasping her firmly by the arm and helping her to her feet.
She nodded graciously to him, letting go of him quickly and straightening up.
'Thank you' she said to him, 'but I can manage on my own.'
'Does anyone see a path?' Jerry asked, squinting in the dark.
'There is one there' Demetrius pointed out. 'Come, we must hurry in case they follow us down here.'
Again Lilith was the last to follow, lingering on the rocky shore, the nightdress she still wore from the night before clung to her skin, though despite the cold, she did not shiver. She spared only last glance behind them, up the river from where they had come in case Jaspin was to appear.
She waited for as long as she dared, before turning and running away, making after the others who had gone on ahead. Only Marin had waited for her, jogging beside her as she made her way onwards. He watched her closely as they ran, so many questions on his mind. But he kept his mouth sealed, instead looking ahead again. The time for talk was not now.
They ran for a short time, before rounding a corner, where the light from the outside world suddenly hit them.
Lilith slowed to a stop, shielding her eyes from the bright light as the others ran on ahead. Marin who had been running with her stopped, panting slightly.
'It's alright' he spoke reassuringly reaching out to take her hand. 'Come on.'
She took his hand, taking a step forward; together they headed towards the light.
They stepped out into the open, joining Ena and the other four brothers.
'We are just outside the town' Reynolds was saying, staring up at the buildings that towered above them.
They were on a grassy verge, on lower ground to the town right beside them, and on their other side, was open land.
'We're never going to make it' Lilith lamented, still unable to conceal her wings as she stared at the wilderness before her. 'They will surely see us.'
'No' Jerry said, pointing to a small section of woodland a distance away. 'If we can make it to those trees, that should give enough cover until we decide where to go from there.'
'Are you still sure you want to involve yourselves?' Lilith asked them.
The brothers looked confused, Earnest shrugged.
'We are already involved now' he said, 'may as well see where this is going.'

‘But it’s dangerous’ Lilith persisted. ‘I don’t know what the soldiers would do if they found out you were involved with my kind.’
‘It doesn’t matter’ Marin spoke stubbornly. ‘It’s too late now.’
‘…Marin’ Lilith mumbled sadly, turning to him.
‘They are coming’ Ena spoke up then, ‘I can feel their presence…’
Lilith’s expression hardened then, and she turned away from Marin and towards the collection of trees. ‘Let’s go’ she spoke firmly, ‘we cannot let them see my wings.’
She forgot Jaspin then, leading the way as she ran, wings beating hopelessly with every step, but as she drew closer to the shelter of the trees, she moved further out into the open.
She only prayed that she remained unnoticed at least for now. If they were caught, she doubted that there was much she could do to protect herself now.
Can I still use my magic? She wondered to herself. *Do I dare even try?*
She bowed her head as she ran, listening to the blood pumping in her ears, trying to focus on her goal, and ignoring all else.

Evening came, and the strange band remained hidden within the network of trees, afraid to leave this place, afraid to stay.
Lilith lingered at the edge of the patch of woods, careful to stay hidden; she stared longingly towards the town they had come from, watching the skies for signs of Jaspin.
But there had been nothing.
Hours had passed, and it was beginning to get dark.
‘Lilith’ spoke a voice.
She stepped back away from the tree she had been clinging to, receding back into the shadows, and turned to face Marin.
‘That is your true name now isn’t it?’ he asked her.
‘Yes’ she spoke meekly, bowing her head. ‘That is my true name, the name I have known all my life.’
Marin watched her sadly, dipping his head slightly.
‘How is Ena?’
Marin raised his head again.
‘She is still very confused.’
Lilith and Marin returned to the denser part of the woods where the others waited, cold and hungry.
Ena sat upon the earth, leaning back against a tree, her long pale hair in great pools around her.
Lilith approached.
‘Ena?’ she spoke tentatively.
Ena raised her head, gazing up at Lilith.
‘What are we doing here again?’ she asked her. ‘Where is Jaspin?’
Lilith regarded her sadly, feeling her heart dampen.
‘He is far away from us now.’
‘And who are you?’ Ena asked Lilith. ‘Why are we here?’

‘She’s been this way for a while’ Jerry told her sadly. ‘There’s something wrong with her, its like her mind is broken.’
‘Do you think its the sickness?’ Marin asked her. ‘This disease you’ve been telling me about?’
‘No’ Lilith answered. ‘The earth maiden cannot subtract such an illness, it is literally impossible.’ She paused then, considering Ena before her as she gazed wide-eyed at the forest around him, so distracted all the time. ‘It was the holy man that did this to her’ Lilith said. ‘His touch has broken her, warping her mind…slowly…destroying her…’
Lilith turned away then to hide her tears, holding back the wave of emotions inside her.
She didn’t want to show her weakness in front of the others.

As darkness descended upon them, Lilith and Marin sat alone, apart from the others.
‘She has been cursed’ Lilith was saying to Marin, talking about Ena. ‘We angels are no longer able to touch our beloved earth maiden.’
Marin turned to her as she spoke.
‘There were others of you?’ he asked her, ‘besides from you and Jaspin?’
‘Once there were many’ Lilith told him sadly, sitting a short distance away from him, hugging her knees to her chest, her wings she was still unable to recede into her, hung behind her like great banners, or the sails of a ship, though in tatters. ‘When I first found the others, there were five of us including myself.’
Lilith went silent for a moment, as she remembered the angels she had once known, now lost to her.
‘Aski was the first to fall. He suffered horribly before his death. His eyes and tongue were cut out, and he suffered from the sickness……I was forced to end his life myself to ease his suffering.’
Lilith’s face screwed up then, and she held her hands tightly before her, trying to stop them from shaking.
She composed herself.
‘And then there was Reuben, who was killed by an arrow. And then…Gael…was stabbed…and killed….by the same man that inflicted those injuries onto me when you first found me. I was lucky to escape him, it was Jaspin who saved me, and Ena who placed the spell upon to that forced me to forget my memory of all of the pain. She did it to protect me, and she placed and illusion on me, so that my hair appeared black, and my scars were gone.’
As she said this, she touched briefly her long white hair, and the scars on her face.
She had received these scars when living as a vagrant on the streets, one night when she was attacked.
It all felt like so long ago now.
‘They were all beautiful’ Lilith lamented, remembering her fallen brethren. ‘I loved all of them.’
She bit her tongue then, doing so hard enough to taste blood.
She fell silent.
Marin who had been listening mutely raised his head then, tilting his chin back as he gazed upon her wings.

‘I'm sorry’ he whispered. ‘I'm sorry all of this has happened to you…I'm sorry you can no longer fly. I would love to have seen you fly.’
Lilith smiled at him, but there was no happiness there.
‘I wish you could have seen them’ she lamented. ‘I wish you could have seen them in their glory…they were….beautiful.’
She tensed then, turning her head to her side, hand going to her head as she frowned hard.
‘I can hear prayer.’
A figure came running to them through the trees.
It was Ena.
She was smiling and giggling.
‘Lilith’ she gasped, out of breath. Everything she did now, they way she moved, the way she spoke, seemed to be a great effort for her. ‘They are coming’ Ena moaned, as if in pain. ‘Our….army….I can feel…’
And then she collapsed.
‘Ena!’ Lilith screeched, reaching out for her instinctively.
But as soon as Lilith made contact with her skin, she felt a sudden pain coursing through her body.
Lilith screamed in agony, stumbling back.
The other brothers came running from the other side of the woods upon hearing the commotion, Marin ran to Lilith, grasping her hand in his and looking at the injury as the other brothers surrounded the fallen Ena.
It was as if Lilith had pressed her hand hard against a hot stove.
The flesh she had touched Ena with, was raw and red and blistered.
Lilith began to cry openly, unable to hold it all back.
‘Jaspin!’ she sobbed. ‘*Where is he????*’

The group moved away shortly after that, lights were seen in the distance near the town, men on horseback.
They were searching for them.
‘We have to get out of here’ Lilith hissed glaring back at them. ‘Please, take Ena and go.’
‘I'm not leaving you’ Marin said to her as Demetrius knelt down to pick up Ena, gathering her long hair together carefully and lifting her slender frame in his arms.
She still had not yet woken, she was completely unresponsive, but alive.
‘I cannot let them have her’ Lilith snarled, becoming angry now. ‘I they will *not* have her.’
‘Why is she so important?’ Marin asked sadly.
‘We are all going to die’ Lilith said to him, ‘all of us. There is a sickness coming, the one that has infected me now.’ She bowed her head suddenly, fighting back tears, only looking up again when she had gathered herself.
She spoke again.
‘We have no idea where it comes from or how it works. It could come from the air, the food, the water….the very earth itself.’ She drew a sharp intake of breath then. ‘I can feel its poison…coursing through my body. It could have been that I've harboured it for a long time,

and that its only showed symptoms now. It affects people different ways, there seems to be different strains of it.'
'And Ena?'
'She is our salvation. She will see us live again, all of us…in another world…in another time…'
Lilith turned to face Marin now.
'That is why you have to get her away. She must not be captured by the enemy. It *cannot* happen. This world will come to an end. Only by her means will she be able to save us.'
'But look at her…' Marin mumbled, glancing back at Demetrius who held her in his arms, waiting for what was to happen. 'You said it yourself…she is dying.'
'We have to get to the heart of the volcano before that happens' Lilith breathed, 'or else all will be lost.'
'You're coming with us?'
Lilith pursed her lips, looking away again towards the lights in the distance, the searing men. The queen's army. No doubt Nina was there too, and Gerald.
'If they come too close' Lilith whispered, 'I will have to part from you.' She paused. 'I am dying' she spoke forlorn. 'I don't have long left. I would die to save Ena, she must survive long enough to reach the mountain, nothing else matters…'
'Lilith….'
'Come' Lilith spoke harshly, controlling her fears and trying her hardest to push them down. 'We must move fast' Lilith said striding past him.
'What will you do if they reach us?' Marin spoke out to her.
Lilith paused then, lifting her hands before her.
She remained a moment where she was, wondering.
And then she ran her hands through the air, moving outwards. A great arch of light appeared in the air before her, she whipped her hand quickly to the side, flicking her white hair back.
The magic shot towards the nearest tree, cutting deep into the solid wood.
Lilith stumbled then, holding herself. Marin started forward to catch her.
'Don't touch me!' she spoke harshly to him. 'Not now…not now that I am infected.'
Marin backed away, and Lilith forced herself to straighten, a painful smile etched into her face.
'So' she grimaced, 'I can still use magic…but at a cost.'
My body is weak…I must be careful.
'Come' she said marching forwards away from the town, heading in a direct path towards the dead volcano before them. 'There must be a way to get into the mountain besides from the air.'
'There are tunnels' Reynolds told her, 'all around the mountain that lead into its heart.'
'Then we will find them' Lilith spoke loudly back without a pause in her step.
Jaspin she thought miserably as she went, the others following quickly after her. *What's happened to you? Please…please be alive…*

They reached the base of the volcano hours later, cold and tired and hungry. Earnest had taken his coat off and placed it over Ena's body as Demetrius carried her. Now, they placed

her on the soft earth, just outside one of the caves they found. Inside the cave the ground was hard, formed of solid rock. Even standing outside the cave, the strong wind that blew through the tunnels could be felt.
Lilith who still wore her nightdress from the night before, shivered violently as the chill bit her flesh.
She lingered outside the cave, a few feet from the others, staring out into the horizon.
The lights were drawing closer.
'I fear they will find us.'
She bowed her head, turning and approaching Ena who lay utterly still.
She was deathly pale, more so than she usually was, her veins were clearly visible in her neck, reaching towards her cheeks like dark cracks in her skin. And as Lilith leant closer, she saw that her breath was shallow.
'I'm sorry…' Lilith whispered, not trusting her voice to speak. 'I failed to save you…'
Ena, hearing her voice, opened her eyes a crack, doing so slowly. Her eyes widened, so that she could see Lilith better.
Ena smiled.
'Our people are coming to us' Ena spoke, in a voice so quiet, that Lilith barely heard it. 'The final battle will be in the heart of the volcano. That is where we will all die…that is where…it will be decided….who will be saved.'
Those would be the last words she would speak.
Ena became silent again, closing her eyes and falling still.
Lilith straightened up.
'You have to keep going' Lilith said. 'You must reach the heart of the mountain.'
'And then what?' Jerry asked.
Lilith stared wide-eyed towards the open lands beyond the cave, where the men that hunted them drew ever closer.
'Wait and see.'
A sudden darkness fell over them.
A few of the brothers cried in panic, and Demetrius leant over Ena protectively.
But it had only been Lilith's magic, and when their eyes cleared again, she was nowhere to be seen.
'She's gone to face them' Earnest said.
'We have to keep going' Jerry hastened, speaking in a raised tone. 'We cannot ignore her word. I have no idea what is happening, but I trust Lilith, I trust in her word…'
Demetrius lifted Ena again in his arms, moving with his brothers into the heart of the cave itself.
Only one lingered at the entrance.
Reynolds turned, calling out to him.
'Marin?!'

The rain began to fall heavily by the time Lilith found her pursuers.

The soldiers pulled the reins back sharply, and the horses skidded to a halt, their hooves slipping on the muddy earth.
'So she comes to us' one of the men sneered, as Lilith before them summoned her magic to her.
'You will not succeed' the man continued, as others began to surround her.
Now there was no way out.
'Nina will be pleased that we found you, but we won't stop there. We want the false maiden too. She too must die.'
Lilith's eyes burned, as did every inch of her body.
'You will join your black and white friend very soon.'
Lilith attacked, casting her magic out, summoning to her every last ounce of strength she still possessed.
She fought.

'Where is she? Is she in here? Is she waiting for me?'
The mother chuckled happily at this, amused by the young man's excitement.
'Calm down Dean' she laughed. 'My daughter is just coming down now, she's be here in a minute or so.'
She turned then, calling up the stairs.
'Ethel!' she called. 'Dean is here to see you!'
There was an exited squeal and immediately the sound of feet thundering down the stairs.
The mother had to dart out of the way as her daughter Ethel ran past her, barrelling into Dean's arms and laughing happily.
He laughed too, lifting her up in his arms and turning on the spot with her, before putting her back down again and hugging her tightly.
'I'm so glad to see you!' she giggled.
'Me too' he beamed.
'Dean….?'
'Yes Ethel?'
'…I can't breathe…'
He let go of her then, and she drew a deep gasp of breath.
'Sorry' he said, grasping her lightly by the hands and nuzzling into her, kissing her neck, his tongue flicking out playfully.
'Stop!' she squeaked, flinching away from him. 'That tickles!'
'Alright you two' the mother said sternly. 'Off with you.'
'Yes before you make the rest of us sick' Ethel's little sister grumbled not too quietly from the kitchen table where she sat.
'Now none of your cheek' the mother said as Ethel stuck her tongue out at her sister. 'Just you wait until you find a man of your own.'
'I'm not going crawl all over him like *she* does' the sister said glaring at Ethel.
The mother turned back to the couple, 'off with you' she said shooing them both outside, 'I'm sure you have places to be.'

The father entered the kitchen just as the couple; Ethel and Dean were leaving the house, arm in arm with one another, gazing into each other's eyes.
'Do you remember when we were young' the father said to the mother, snaking his hand around her waist and pulling him sharply to her.
'Yes' the mother smiled slyly, 'you were such a gentleman back then.'
'Oh please?!' the young daughter called out as her parents began to kiss. 'Do you have to do that in front of me?!'
Outside, Dean and Ethel wandered deep into the woods, alone together.
They reached a river that was too deep to cross without getting wet. Unprompted Dean turned to Ethel, lifting her in his arms.
She chuckled happily, hanging off him with her arms wrapped around his neck.
He carried her to the other side, placing her back onto the soft earth.
She leant back, pulling her to him and embracing him in a warm embrace.
'I love you Ethel' Dean whispered, speaking between kisses. 'I love you more than life itself. I would do anything for you….*anything*….I would rather die than be without you.'
'Oh Ethel…' she breathed.
He reached towards her, placing his lips over hers, kissing her tenderly.
He pushed her back gently onto the forest floor, hand running up her thigh beneath her dress.
Ethel tensed then, before her body relaxed, accepting his touch.

Lilith was shoved forwards, falling on her front, the men in the courtyard around her laughed cruelly, amused by her pain and fear.
After she had fought and killed several of the men, she had been subdued, and brought to another place, further away from the mountain to which she headed.
Though when she raised her head to the walls around her, she could still see it, off in the distance, it was not too far away.
'Why are you heading to that place?' one of the soldiers asked her as she crawled forwards on her hands and knees, struggling to get back to her feet.
Her body was weak, and she trembled violently now. Her magic was all but spent, there was nothing left now. It was a tremendous effort just to stand. But she was forced to the ground again, letting out a deep breath as a foot was placed on her back.
She turned her head around to look at the man, her great wings she could no longer control, folded above her.
The man surveyed them.
'You have no place' the man spoke menacingly to her, 'in heaven….or on earth…'
He drew his sword then. Lilith's heart stopped in her chest as she heard the sing of the blade being drawn from the sheath.
He grabbed both her wings in one hand, swinging back his sword.
He cut Lilith's wings clean off in one swipe, Lilith screaming in agony as both the vital veins were cut in her wings.
She began to bleed out, both veins cut, she began to seep blood at an alarming rate.

‘What is going on here?!’
Another figure appeared on the balcony running around the courtyard.
He ran down the steps towards them, grabbing a burning torch from the wall and shoving the soldier that stood over Lilith out the way.
Lilith screamed again as he pressed the burning torch to her flesh, cauterizing the wound, and instantly stopping the bleeding.
Lilith slumped forward, her body resting against the cold hard stone beneath her.
She let out a sigh, utterly exhausted, she closed her eyes.
She had been saved.
The man that had saved her turned to the one that had nearly killed her, glaring at him angrily.
‘You were not given permission to kill these creatures’ he snarled. ‘You were acting without command.’
‘But sir’ the soldier answered cautiously. ‘They are monsters.’
The man that had saved Lilith grimaced, the edges of his eyes twitching.
He threw the torch to the wings that lay on the ground, setting them alight.
They burned quickly, the dying feathers quickly catching light along with the flesh and bone, leaving behind nothing but ash.

Chapter Fifty Four
City of Flowers

Many days ago

The manor was a large building, constructed more like a fortress than a home. Its occupants were forced from their home, an old war veteran and his family.
‘You can’t do this!’ the gruff man exclaimed, gritting his teeth in anger at Nina who stood before him. Her men were already swarming the manor. ‘This is *our* home’ he cried. ‘You don’t belong here.’
‘I'm sorry’ Nina spoke to her in a level tone. ‘You have no idea what is coming.’
‘What?’
She threw a bag of coins at his feet.
‘That should be enough to see you through to the end.’
The old man glanced down at the large bag, before his attention flickered back up at Nina.
He reached down to pick it up.
‘What do you mean?’ the woman before Nina asked, the wife of the veteran who stood behind him, hugging her daughter to her. ‘What end?’
‘Everything will come to an end’ Nina told her. ‘Very soon, nothing else will matter.’
‘You won’t get away with this’ the veteran growled angrily. ‘Our king knows you’re here, he will kill you.’

‘Yes’ Nina answered, ‘he knows we are here, and as for killing us….?’ she paused then. ‘He is welcome to try.’
The veteran grimaced at her.
‘Why did you even come here’ he snarled. ‘What do you want? Why are you doing this?’
Nina tilted her head back towards the clouds. Sitting upon the horizon was the mountain, the dead volcano. The place where Ena had claimed it would all come to an end.
‘You should go’ Nina said to them.
‘Not without my children.’
Nina’s eyes flashed at him.
‘They are staying with me’
‘I won’t leave without them’ the veteran replied.
Nina sighed heavily, bowing her head. She lifted her chin again, facing the man, summoning to her the last of the magic she possessed, using her powers to lace her voice as she spoke.
‘Your children will stay’ she said. ‘You will go.’
The veteran stared at her.
‘Very well’ he said, as his wife nodded behind him.
The child she held looked alarmed, glancing to each of her parents. ‘What are you saying?!’
The veteran turned and walked away, his wife walked with him, pulling their daughter with her, and ignoring her protests.
‘This doesn’t feel right’ Gerald spoke out.
He had been standing behind Nina as the scene unfolded, watching the family walk away.
‘We should leave the children out of this.’
Nina took a step back, turning to face him.
‘We will hold this place’ she said to him. ‘From here we will send scouts out to search for the angels…they are hiding in these lands somewhere.’
‘Do you plan to kill the remaining angels as well as the girl?’ Gerald asked.
‘Yes’ Nina replied meekly. ‘They will not be able to travel far now’ she said. ‘The false maiden has been poisoned, and the angels will not leave her side.’
‘They are hiding from us now’ Gerald said.
‘It’s alright’ Nina said, ‘we will find them. There is no rush.’
‘The king of these lands will find us’ Gerald said. ‘He will send men to try to kill us. We are a threat to him; look at what we’ve done.’
‘It’s alright’ Nina said again, speaking with surety. ‘We have a good stronghold here.’
Gerald looked about them at the manor and the grounds held within its high walls.
‘We could be trapped here’
‘They won’t find us’ Nina said. ‘We will hide. I placed a spell upon the veteran and his wife. They have already forgotten all about us.’
Gerald bowed his head silently.
‘Come’ Nina said to him. ‘I want to speak to the queen.’

Grace was inside the manor, sitting in one of the larger rooms near its heart.
There were no windows here, and the room was cold. The queen sat before a vanity dresser, brushing slowly her hair.

She paused when she saw the door behind her open, and the figures of Nina and Gerald enter. Grace turned in her chair as they approached.
‘Is everything alright?’ the queen asked.

A short time later, they left the queen, moving through the manor now, and to the cellar where the children were kept.
‘Do you have the do this?’ Gerald asked Nina in a pained voice as she approached the three small children huddled together in the corner of the cellar.
‘It’s the only way’ Nina breathed, reaching out to the terrified huddle. ‘I have no magic left in me, I have been driven to use it all…but now I need more.’ She paused then, her tall shadow falling over the children. ‘This is a necessity’ she uttered. ‘The the only way…the only way I can call more magic to me…. is to harvest their souls….’

Gerald sat alone in one of the rooms after that, leaving forwards against the table with his head in his hands. He heard a faint noise then, and raised his head to the window before him, seeing in the courtyard beyond, the bodies of the three young children being taken away.
Their souls would never find peace.

It was many days after that, that the angels were found.
The black and white one was captured first, and then shortly after, the white one, the one that was sick.
She was brought to one of the courtyards, her wings cut from her and burned.
Gerald had saved her life, cauterizing the wounds before she bled out.
She was taken to one of the higher rooms in the manor then, and laid on a bed to rest, lying on her front.
Gerald went to visit her shortly after.
It was night time, and the world was still.
Gerald entered the room. It was a large room, lit by many candles. Upon the bed at the back of the room, lay Lilith.
The door swung shut behind Gerald, and he moved towards her, his heavy footsteps loud upon the wooden floor.
He stood over Lilith, observing her now. After several seconds, she turned her head towards him, meeting him in her gaze.
Then at last she spoke.
‘Why…?’
Her voice was weak, barely even a whisper.
‘I'm sorry’ Gerald said to her. ‘I didn’t mean for this to happen.’

He drew a chair up to sit beside her bed, looking over her body as he did so.
She was naked from the waist up. The blood from her back had been cleaned, and the wound had been left uncovered, allowed to heal naturally.
'It must be a terrible thing' Gerald said to her, 'for a creature like you…to lose something so dear.' He paused then, bowing his head, before continuing. 'Even a caged bird needs wings.'
Lilith blinked slowly as she listened.
'Is that what troubles you?' she mumbled. 'The fact that this has happened to me? I understood that we were on opposite sides.'
Gerald pursed his lips, holding back his tongue.
'You hold doubt' Lilith voiced. 'I can see it in your eyes.'
'I don't know what is right anymore.'
Lilith did not answer, but watched him closely.
The firelight around them burned quietly, a drip of liquid-wax ran down the side of one of the candles and to the gold tray below.
'Has Ena been found?' Lilith asked. 'Our earth maiden…she is the only reason I still live and breathe…the only reason I have to still exist in this world.'
'Is she truly as good as you believe she is?'
'She is our saviour' Lilith whispered, 'she is the beginning of all things……and the end……'
'What will happen to us?' Gerald asked her. 'What will happen to all of us?'
Lilith blinked slowly, letting out a heavy breath.
'In the end…' she sighed, 'we will all return to the dust from whence we came…'

Gerald left her then, instead going to his own room, the room that he shared now with Nina, the master bedroom.
Here is where Nina found him.
'You went to see the angel' she said in a short voice. 'Didn't you.'
It wasn't phrased like a question.
'Yes' he answered quietly back, 'I did.'
'Why?'
'I was curious.'
She glided up to him, standing close to him with her arms folded.
'You know she will try to deceive you.'
'I spoke to her only briefly.'
Nina paused, regarding him closely.
'My powers have come back to me' she told him, 'and my army, they are nearby.'
Gerald did not answer, but continued to watch her back.
'I sense a great presence' she spoke at last.
'A presence?' Gerald thought. 'Could it be the one the angels call Ena?'
'No' Nina shook her head. 'This is something else…something…*different*.'
Gerald waited for her to speak.

‘I feel the consciousness of many’ Nina continued, ‘a great mass of thoughts…of anger. I feel them coming this way. I believe it is her army, coming to save her.’
‘You have not found her yet?’
‘Not yet’ Nina replied, ‘but soon. She cannot hide for long.’
Gerald looked away.
‘I have ordered the white angel to be taken from the room and to the cellars to join the other one’ Nina continued.
Gerald looked back at her at this.
‘You have a tender spot for her?’ Nina asked him.
‘No’ Gerald answered quietly, ‘it’s not like that.’
‘Then what?’
‘I just feel…’ Gerald hesitated. ‘How do we know we are doing the right thing?’
‘You doubt me?’
Gerald drew back sharply, backing away from her.
‘There is something wrong’ Nina spoke seriously as he continued to back away. ‘That angel has filled you with her lies.’ She became angry then. ‘Ena’s word has seeped into you through her…she has infected you…*why* did you speak to her?’
‘I had to see for myself’ Gerald told her as she began to circle him.
He never took his eyes from her.
‘You should never have done what you have done’ Gerald said to her. ‘You should never have done it.’
Nina opened her mouth slightly, watching him closely. But she did not speak.
‘You have taken so many lives yourself’ Gerald whispered to her, ‘but no more…’
He reached for her, hand out-stretched, but she lunged for him before he could touch her, grabbing a heavy lamp from the table and swinging it in the air, hitting him hard across the forehead.
Gerald stumbled to the side, the gash in the side of his temple was deep, but he seemed to feel no pain.
He started for her.
Nina dropped the lamp as Gerald grabbed her by the throat pushing her back against the dresser behind her. Nina leant away from him as far as she could go, gasping weakly as his hands wrapped around her throat. She held onto him, trying to pry his fingers from her neck. But his grip was strong, unnaturally so.
After a few seconds she let her hands relax, arms falling weakly by her side as she stared back at him, tears brimming in her eyes. She opened her mouth one last time to try to speak, but no sound came out.
Gerald held her there, until her whole body slumped, her brain starved from oxygen, died, and the magic she held in her body at that point left her.
She was now only a shell.
Gerald slowly eased his grip, drawing his hand back and catching her as she fell. He lifted her, carrying her slender frame in his arms and laying her on the bed, folding her hands together over her heart as he did.

He leant back regarding her. The marks he had left on her neck were clearly visible. Gerald narrowed his eyes as he saw this, before he stepped away from her, turning and heading towards the door.
He lingered there for a moment on the threshold; hand on the handle, staring inwards at her dead body, before closing the door and locking it, leaving her there in solitude.

Lilith raised her head. The place she was in now was cold and dark. There was almost no light in the cellars, and there was a constant howl that ran through the corridors, a draft from one of the small barred windows close to the ceiling.
Lilith had been brought to this place shortly after Gerald had left her. Soldiers had come for her. She had been given a baggy white shirt to wear to cover her body, and escorted through the manor to the lower levels, and finally here to the cellar.
Lilith sat now, thinking that she was alone. She sat upon a wooden crate quietly, with her hands folded in her lap and her head bowed.
A few moments later, there came movement to her side.
Lilith tensed slightly, turning towards the sound of movement.
A figure approached her, looming through the darkness closer.
Lilith's eyes grew wide, and she saw the figure there.
'……Jaspin?'
He took a step closer to her.
His injuries a glance were clear, prevalent. But unlike her, Jaspin had not received treatment for his wounds.
'Lilith…'
He reached out for her in the dark, hand brushing and caressing her cheek.
'I'm so glad you're alright.'
Lilith looked at him closely. Dried blood crusted his skin beneath his right eye, and he has gashes and old blood all over his body.
Jaspin smiled weakly at her, drawing a shuddering breath between his clenched teeth.
'Where is Ena?' he asked her. 'Is she safe?'
'I don't know' Lilith replied in a whisper.
Jaspin's smile faltered then, and he drew his hand back from her.
Lilith's face contorted in misery, and she looked away from him, tears spilling from her eyes.
Jaspin glanced to Lilith's back, reaching out to her again. He lifted her shirt, seeing where her wings had been cut, the wound cauterized.
'Oh no…' he let the material fall. 'What have they done to you…?'
'I don't know where Ena is' Lilith whispered, facing away from him. 'I left her…with the others….with Marin…and his brothers.'
'Where did you leave them?' Jaspin asked her.
'We reached the foot of the mountain' Lilith went on. 'I parted from them…near the tunnel entrance……that is all I know…'
Jaspin bowed his head, looking to the floor with sorrow.
'I cannot fly anymore…' Lilith mumbled. 'I am dying…the sickness has claimed me at last.'
Jaspin turned away. 'We have to get out of here' he said. 'We have to find a way to escape.'

‘There is no way out of here’ Lilith said to him. ‘This place is built like a fortress.’
Jaspin looked back at her.
‘I was blindfolded when I was brought here…’ he raised his wrists before him then, revealing heavy bruises that wound around his wrists. ‘They were…not kind to me…not gentle….’
‘You can still fly?’ Lilith asked him.
‘Yes’ he murmured. ‘I still have my wings.’
Lilith smiled to him sadly.
‘Well…’ she uttered, ‘….that’s something…’ she paused. ‘I hope the others make it’ she said. ‘I hope…they get away…’
‘Oh…’ Jaspin said, his voice alarmed.
‘What is it?’
Jaspin gritted his teeth then, brow furrowed.
‘We are the only two angels left now in this world…which means we have become more valuable to Ena…she still needs us….’
Lilith stared at him, her eyes widened then.
‘If we are killed then we lose our value’ she realised. ‘You think they are keeping us to lure Ena here?’
‘I hope it doesn’t work’ Jaspin rasped.
‘You really think she might come?’ Lilith said with worry.
‘She needs us’ Jaspin said. ‘Who knows what she will do?’

Away from this place, at the roots of the volcano, the five brothers travelled with Ena through the tunnels. As they had delved deeper into the dark, and as they had, her body had begun to glow, lighting the way. She was emitting from her heart and chest a vibrant green glow. It never faded, but only grew brighter.
After a while the brothers sat down to rest on the cold hard rock. The tunnels were windy, and they huddled together to keep warm. They rested Ena down upon the rock, covering her body with a coat.
Ena opened her eyes after a time, rising to her feet. A small piece of her old self still remained, and she wobbled as she made her way tentatively forwards, moving away from the brothers. She stumbled, nearly falling over. Behind her, the brothers did not move. She reached her magic out to them, keeping them still.
She made her way through the tunnel alone, heading back the way they had come, towards the men that pursued her.

Hours passed, before Gerald went down into the cellar to see the angels.
Jaspin moved to stand close to Lilith, facing Gerald who stood on the other side of the bars.
Gerald regarded them.

For a long time he didn't say anything, but simply watched them closely, as if assessing the situation. And then he spoke.
'You are both very important to the earth maiden.'
'What makes you say that?' Lilith asked him,
'Ena has been found' Gerald told him shortly. 'If I didn't know better, I would say that she gave herself up…for you perhaps' he raised his head.
'You lie' Jaspin whispered to him, rage rising deep within him. He narrowed his eyes with distrust at Gerald. 'She would never do that for us.'
'Well maybe she is not in her normal state of mind' Gerald said turning to Jaspin. 'It is true…' he went on casually, 'that she appears unwell.'
Jaspin stated at him.
'We I get out of here' he spoke dangerously to Gerald, 'I will kill you.'
Gerald stated levelly back. 'I'm sure you could' he said. 'I'm sure you would.'
Lilith's expression was pained, and she looked from Jaspin to Gerald.
'He needs to have his wounds seen to' Lilith said, 'at least bring some water and cloths so that I may clean him myself.'
'No' Jaspin snapped angrily. 'I would rather suffer than accept anything from them.'
'Your friend is stubborn' Gerald said to Lilith.
'You should not have let them touch you' Jaspin spoke to Lilith, ignoring Gerald.
Lilith did not answer. She only bowed her head, hands placed over her heart.
'Ena is here' Gerald told them again. 'Would you like to see her?'
Jaspin tensed slightly, eyes widening.
Lilith hesitated, glancing silently to Jaspin, then back at Gerald again.
Gerald took a step back then, allowing the soldier, one of many that stood around him, to step forwards and open the barred door in the cellar.
'Is this is trick?' Jaspin called out to him suspiciously as Gerald turned and walked away, making his way back up and stairs and out of the cellar.
'It is no trick' Gerald answered back, turning back to face him. 'Come with me and you shall see.'
Jaspin glanced suspiciously at the armoured soldiers around them, seeing the mistrust in their eyes, hate, anger, and even a little fear. Despite being so broken, Jaspin looked imposing, still standing strong, and still covered in blood.
He stepped forwards cautiously, Lilith followed in his footsteps slowly, moving behind him.
They ascended the stone steps that led out of the cellar, walking after Gerald. The guards followed behind them, all with their weapons at the ready. Jaspin noticed this. But there was little he could do, trapped in small quarters like this, it wouldn't be hard for them to kill him now, he was weak, exhausted, and yet still ready to fight if driven to do so. But he wouldn't, not now, not yet.
'Its going to be alright' he heard Lilith speak beside him.
He shot a glance back at her, before facing forwards again. He clenched his teeth.

Gerald led them through the manor, and to one of the higher rooms. He ordered the soldiers that followed them to remain outside as he opened the door, allowing the angels to walk in before him as he held the door open for them.

They entered the room, one after the other, turning to glance out as Gerald entered after them. They both saw the soldiers linger there. They would stay outside, in case anything happened. Jaspin saw this, and he also saw as he took in the room around them, that there were no windows.
He grimaced then, facing now the four-poster bed in the centre of the room. Around the bed were thin white sheets, hiding from view whoever lay there.
Jaspin felt a twinge of nervousness at this sight. He remained a distance away from the bed, standing close to Lilith, as Gerald approached.
'I did not expect her to give herself up like she did' Gerald was saying as he stopped beside the bed. 'I do not know…what she thought she would achieve by this.'
He paused then, glancing back at the angels.
'I want you to know that if you try anything dangerous or try to hurt me that I will kill you. This entire room is rigged with traps….it would be only too easy.'
Jaspin narrowed his eyes, his attention flickering to the side. He noticed then a suit of armour holding a crossbow that was pointed towards the centre of the room, towards the bed. He looked up then, noticing also that a spear hung from the ceiling itself, its sharpened point facing downwards, right above the bed itself, right in the centre.
Jaspin looked back at Gerald, expression level, holding back his emotions.
'I am going to show her to you now, like I said I would.'
Gerald pulled the white sheet back, revealing a figure lying on the bed.
Jaspin and Lilith both gasped simultaneously, eyes wide in shock.
Upon the white sheets, lay Ena; her profile abnormally tall and skinny, wearing the same laced dress as before. Her pale green hair having grown longer than it had ever been, ran along her body down the bed, past her feet and over the edge of the bed. Her skin was pale and her eyes sunken as they had been before. But this time something was different about her. Great cracks in her skin had appeared, black veins creeping up her neck and to her cheeks here clearly visible beneath the flesh.
'I understand she is just fifteen years old' Gerald spoke quietly as he let go of the white sheet that he had pulled back. 'It's just too young' he mumbled, '…too young to die…'
Gerald reached for her, stroking her hair.
'Don't touch her' Jaspin hissed angrily.
'Who is she exactly?' Gerald answered back, seeming not to have heard Jaspin. 'What makes her so special, why is she so important to you?'
He drew his hand back.
'If she will see the end of the world come about…' Gerald answered. 'Why would you want that?'
'Where is your mistress?' Jaspin asked suddenly. 'I refuse to believe she would allow us to be free.'
Gerald was silent, staring down at Ena's still profile.
'She doesn't know does she' Jaspin stated. 'Where is she?'
'I do not have to answer to you' Gerald said facing Jaspin.
'So what are you going to do to her?' Jaspin asked, fearing to hear the answer. 'What are you going to do to Ena now that you have her, are you planning to kill her?'

‘I don’t know’ Gerald said, casting his gaze over her again. ‘I don’t know what I should do. I don’t know if killing her will cause more damage.’
‘Let me touch her’ Jaspin whispered. ‘Let me feel her skin.’
‘You cannot’ Gerald answered. ‘She has been cursed…no angel can touch her now.’
‘I will make you suffer for what you have done’ Jaspin threatened. ‘I promise you this…I promise you…that you will die at my hands.’
‘There is no need for such anger’ Gerald replied.
‘We have to get to the mountain’ Jaspin said to him, ‘all of us’ he glanced from Ena to Lilith as he said this.
‘I'm afraid’ Gerald said speaking slowly, ‘that Ena will not be able to leave this place.’
‘You are going to imprison her here as you are imprisoning us?’
‘Why do you want to get to the mountain so badly’ Gerald asked Jaspin.
‘Because’ Jaspin answered, ‘this is where all this will end.’
‘Is that what Ena has told you?’ Gerald asked. ‘And how will that happen with her in this state?’
An expression of pain flickered across Jaspin’s face, for the briefest moment showing through the cracks in his shield. He quickly regained himself.
‘So what are you going to do with us now?’
Gerald regarded him.
‘I don’t know what will happen if I kill you’ Gerald said to them both, ‘and so I will keep you both here.’
‘To rot in chains forever?’ Jaspin asked. ‘I would rather die.’
He made a move towards Gerald, but Lilith stopped him suddenly, grasping onto his arm firmly.
The two angels exchanged a glance, before looking back at Gerald.
‘I want no violence here. Gerald’ she said, moving closer to him, ‘I…want only peace.’
Gerald flinched as Lilith reached out to touch him, leaning back away from her in surprise as she raised her head to his, kissing him softly.
Behind her, Jaspin grimaced, his shied breaking apart as he watched. He was livid, but didn’t say anything, instead keeping his anger to himself.
‘I want us to be together’ Lilith said to Gerald. ‘I know what you did to Nina. I know that she is dead.’
Jaspin tensed slightly, blinking and tilting his head back.
‘Nina is dead?’ he asked.
‘Yes’ Lilith said back to him. ‘I can sense it.’
‘Why would you do that?’ Jaspin hissed.
‘It does not matter’ Lilith answered quickly before Gerald could speak, ‘please’ Lilith said to Gerald. ‘I want us to be alone again.’
‘Lilith what are you saying?’ Jaspin whispered to her.
‘I don’t want you’ Lilith said. ‘Please, go back to your cell.’

Jaspin left the room, returning to the cellar, escorted by the mass of soldiers, half of which walked ahead of them, the other half behind him.

Jaspin returned to the silent darkness, withdrawing into the corner and huddling up, waiting, simply waiting, for whatever was to happen.

Elsewhere in the manor, Gerald and Lilith went away to another room together, where it was quiet.
Gerald held the door open for Lilith, closing the door after her as she entered the room and locking it.
He turned towards Lilith, who waited for him on the other side of the room expectantly, standing beside the four poster bed at the back of the room.
Lilith sighed, turning her head to the side, and sat down on the bed, leaning back against it.
Gerald approached.
He reached out for her, caressing her face tenderly as he leant down to kiss her, Lilith feeling her tongue inside her mouth.
She fall back against the bed as Gerald descended over her, kneeling on the bed on top of her, his hand running down her body, feeling her chest, running down to her navel and between her legs.
Lilith drew a deep gasp and Gerald moved off her, kneeling beside the bed before her. He grasped her leg, pushing her dress up and running his tongue up her thigh. Lilith tensed then, balling the sheets up in her hands as she gritted her teeth, closing her eyes, before opening them again slowly, as Gerald drew back.
Gerald pushed Lilith further up the bed, leaning over her. Lilith pulled him close to her, clinging onto him as he thrust into her, feeling him deep inside. She let him to do her what he wanted, lying on her side when he had finished.
She was silent, feeling him trail his finger over her naked him.
'You are beautiful' he said to her.
Lilith glanced back at him, her eyes large.
'You think I am beautiful?' she said to him. 'With these horrid scars I have on my face?'
'I do not see the scars' Gerald told her. 'I only see your heart.'
She watched him silently, before looking away again.
'Why did you kill your mistress?' Lilith asked.
Gerald did not answer; Lilith looked back at him again.
'I cannot resist' Gerald breathed, pulling her over onto her back, 'I have to have you again.'
Lilith moaned as he bit into her neck painfully, pushing his fingers between her legs. He held her wrist with his other hand, moving forcefully inside her. He was aggressive, violent in his actions. Lilith lay there submissively as he sated his lust. She did not resist him, but gave herself to him. She did not resist.

The next morning, Lilith was allowed to wander the manor alone, coming to a balcony at one of the higher levels. Here she stood in the fresh air, breathing the scent of freshly cut grass, seeing several men tending to the garden below them, making themselves at home here at this place. Others were baking bread, the sweet smell of the fresh loaves reaching her. Men were calling out to one another in casual chat, and birds were flitting through the air, little sparrows

perched on the edges of the rooftops and on the branches, eating seeds left out for them on the bird table.
It was so bizarre, Lilith found herself thinking, how normal everything seemed.
'It is the calm before the storm' Lilith mumbled to herself.
She bowed her head, turning as she sensed someone standing behind her.
There stood Gerald, maintaining a distance of several feet between them.
'You like it here?' he asked her.
'I don't know if I would say that?' she spoke to the ground.
'I wonder' Gerald said to her calmly, 'would you escape this place if you could. If you could fly away, would you do so?'
Lilith stared at him. She didn't answer.
Gerald approached, moving to stand beside her; he gazed out over the balcony.
'Look at this place' Gerald said to her. 'Look at this world. Is this the destruction that you claim to be, the sickness that has spread?' He paused. 'Everything is as it should be.'
Lilith took in the scenery around her. It was peaceful, tranquil.
'Wait and see' Lilith said. 'It will reach us. Remember this picture' she told him, 'because things will never be the same again.'

'Andrew' the soldier hissed, lingering in the doorway. 'What are you doing? Come away from there.'
'I have to see' Andrew replied, approaching the four poster bed and pulling back the white sheet that surrounded it.
Michael did not move from the doorway, he glanced up and down the corridor before looking back into the room again.
'Andrew.'
'She's just a child' Andrew said back to Michael, speaking quietly. 'She's so young…and frail.'
'Do you really think she is what they say she is?' Michael asked hurriedly.
'Who could say?'
Andrew stared down at Ena, who lay there on the bed, utterly still.
'I wonder why she will not wake' he mumbled, reaching out to touch her.
'Someone is coming' Michael hissed, glancing down the corridor one way.
Andrew glanced feverishly at him, drawing his hand back without having touched Ena.
He swiftly exited the room.
By the time the figure appeared, Andrew and Michael were out of sight, hiding around the corner.
The new figure, one of the other soldiers, strode down the corridor briskly and away.
'What are you going to do?' Michael asked Andrew as they peered around the corner at the figure walking away.
'I don't know' Andrew whispered, 'but I know that it's not good.'
'What do you mean?'

‘Nina is missing’ Andrew replied. ‘I cannot find her, not since the arrival of the white haired one…I should have killed her…he should not have stopped me.’ He narrowed his eyes. ‘And Grace, the queen…she is…she is….’ He gritted his teeth. ‘I don’t know what's causing this, it may be that strange girl with green hair, the one they call the earth maiden. It may be *she* who is behind it all.’
‘In the condition she’s in?’ Michael asked.
‘Who knows’ Andrew replied flatly, facing him at last. ‘Who knows what that witch it capable of?’

‘How could you degrade yourself like that?’ Jaspin snarled at her, his body trembling, barely containing his anger.
Lilith bowed her head, folding her arms calmly. She thought before she answered.
‘I did what I had to’ she answered, ‘to survive….it’s what I've always done.’
‘I'm disgusted with you.’
Lilith raised her head.
‘I can smell him’ Jaspin said, wrinkling his nose at her. ‘I can smell his touch on you…his….his….’ he gritted his teeth, glaring at her. ‘How could you do this to yourself?’
‘I did what I had to’ Lilith answered, speaking quietly now. ‘I am sorry…’
‘So why did you come here?’ Jaspin asked, his tone harsh.
Lilith looked to the ground again. ‘I’ve been given free rein of this place, and I've looked everywhere. This place is a fortress’ she spoke meekly. ‘I don’t know how to get out…I fear…’ she trailed off then, before speaking again a few moments later. ‘I fear we will all die at this place.’
Jaspin turned away from her, beginning to pace behind the bars like a caged animal.
‘Ena must be freed, we must reach the mountain’ he said.
‘How?’ Lilith pleaded.
Jaspin stopped his pacing suddenly, turning to face her.
‘Leave me’ he whispered.
Lilith unfolded her arms.
She turned and walked away, heading back up the stairs and out of the cellar. The door was locked behind her.

A day passed, and Jaspin remained in the cell. He was growing weak, having had nothing to eat, his injuries slowly healing on their own, he was tired.
Jaspin moved closer to the barred window, reaching out to touch the rusty bars lightly, staring out through the narrow gap at the world beyond, the moon hanging in the dark sky above them. He felt so lost, so frightened, trapped here in this prison underground.
He waited. It was all that he could do. He waited, and he prayed.

It was then he felt a presence in his mind, a great mass of thought drawing closer.
He placed his hands either side of his temple, bowing his head and grimacing.
'What is this I feel…?' he uttered.

Upstairs, in one of the other rooms within the manor and standing alone, was Lilith.
She stood before the window on the higher level, looking out of the glass at the world beyond.
It was cold, beautiful, yet it felt empty.
In the courtyard below, a few men on guard stood here and there beside burning torches held in brackets. They walked quietly among themselves in mumbled voices, their shadows flickering on the ground around them.
An owl hooted in the night, and Lilith lifted her chin up, gazing across the property before her through the window. Around the courtyard was a very high wall, the only gate made of heavy metal and held up by large weights that rested on the ground. Lilith could see the great bars of the gate designed in a grid shape, the spikes at the bottom would fit perfectly in the ground beneath it. Beyond this wall were more buildings, and another high wall. In fact there were several walls here, a mote, a drawbridge. This place truly was a fortress. There was no way anyone would be able to enter or leave this place unless they were known of and given permission to do so.
There was only one way out that Lilith could see, and she saw it clearly before her, welcoming her, calling out to her.
'…the sky…' Lilith uttered.
Her eyes began to sting, and a single tear trickled down her cheek.
'I will never be able to fly freely again…'
She tensed suddenly, feeling something within her mind.
There was a great presence, a mass of though suddenly known to her conscious. She touched a finger to her forehead.
'What is this?'
The sensation remained there for many minutes, never going away, but after a time was replaced with something else, something far stronger.
'…Ena!'
She could feel the earth maiden's consciousness in her own mind. She was herself again, and she was waking.
Lilith turn tailed and ran, darting out of the room and down the corridor. She stopped abruptly when she heard sound coming from around a corner, changing her pace to an amble, the two soldiers rounded the corner, giving her suspicious looks as they went by. Lilith kept her head down as she slowly passed them, eyes fixed to the floor. She ignored the two men completely, she knew they hated her, knew they wanted to hurt her, like so many in her past had wanted, because of what she was.
Many believe that fallen angels are usurpers and betrayers of god, who have no place in heaven or on earth.
The soldiers walked around the corner behind her and out of sight. Lilith glanced behind her to make sure they were gone, before picking up her pace to a jog again.

The manor was mostly deserted. The majority of the soldiers were positioned someone outside, near the gates and upon the walls and watch towers.
Lilith reached the room and opened the door without pause, seeing Ena sitting up with her legs over the edge of the bed, there was fear in her eyes.
'Where am I?' she pleaded.
Lilith ran to her, grabbing her by the wrist.
'We have to get out of here' she hissed to Ena. 'This place is not safe, they want to hurt you.'
It was clear by her demeanour and expression that Ena did not recognise Lilith, did not know who she was. But Ena did not try to resist her. She was terrified, as was Lilith, as now, she was able to touch her.
She is not herself Lilith thought with dismay.
'Come on' Lilith said pulling Ena to her feet.
The instant her weight had shifted from the bed, the spear which hung from the ceiling with the tip pointed down was released. Shooting downwards it stabbed the bed, going right the way through. Had anyone been lying upon the bed, it would have killed them for sure.
Upon seeing this, Ena began to sob.
'Where is my family?' she whispered through her tears.
Lilith didn't answer, her resolve clear.
We have to escape, we have to…somehow…
'Jaspin will know what to do' Lilith breathed. 'This place is a fortress; the only way to escape is by air.'
Lilith pulled Ena with her out of the room, coming to a stop beyond the door and glancing first one day down the corridor then the other.
She chose a direction, and ran, pulling Ena with her.
Their footsteps were light upon the carpeted floor, Lilith's heart was heavy in her chest.
They ran through the manor together, heading to the lower floors, all the while, Lilith never let go of Ena.
Lilith stopped then, leaning back against the wall as she glanced around the corner to the entrance of the cellar, where stood two soldiers.
'Dam' she hissed.
Lilith straightened up again, pressing herself against the wall.
'You have to stay here' she whispered to Ena. 'Stay here and stay out of sight.'
Ena nodded, shrinking back.
Lilith looked away again, stepping out from behind the corner. She sauntered across the open hallway, clearly in view of the two men who regarded her with distrust and distain.
Lilith glanced their way, before tripping and falling into a plinth, atop of which sat a decorative vase which crashed to the floor, the pieces scattered everywhere.
She moaned, holding herself and shuddering.
The guards exchanged a glance, before one of them approached her.
'Hey what are you doing?' he demanded. 'You shouldn't be here.'
'I'm sorry' Lilith uttered, rising to her feet gingerly. She cut his throat, using a shard of the broken vase.
The man clawed at his throat hopelessly, spluttering and gurgling, eyes wide in horror.

He fell to his knees; Lilith glanced up at the second man as he stared in shock for just a brief moment, before drawing his sword and striding towards her.
Lilith braced herself, drawing a deep breath.
'We should have killed you the instant was captured you' he snarled, drawing his sword back.
She bolted towards him quicker than he could react, grabbing the pommel of his sword and twisting it out of his grasp. She stabbed him in the throat with the shard of vase before he knew what was happening.
The man collapsed, dead, blood seeping across the floor from both bodies and staining her clothes.
Lilith glanced back, seeing Ena peering at her from around the corner. Lilith beaconed her over, lifting the key she had swiped from the guard before he fell.
Ena ran over to her as Lilith turned and strode away, heading for the cellar.
Inside Jaspin raised his head as he heard the door open, saw the shadows of two figures descend the stairs.
He gasped, drawing closer to the bars.
'Ena?!'
'We have to escape' Lilith told him hastily, shoving the key in the lock and turning.
Jaspin could not hold the brief sneer from his lips as he glanced at Lilith, slipping through the door the moment it was open. He went for Ena.
'Ena, are you alright?'
'I don't know…' Ena uttered, staring up at Jaspin with large eyes, 'I don't know who you are…'
Jaspin gritted his teeth, turning back to Lilith.
'I cannot carry both of you' Jaspin said to her.
'You can touch Ena' Lilith said to him, 'at least…for the meantime…' she clenched her teeth, tears brimming in her eyes. 'Leave me here' Lilith said to Jaspin. 'Leave me…and take Ena with you. Escape… and never look back.'
Jaspin narrowed his eyes.
'Let's go' he said, striding up the stairs.
Ena and Lilith made after him, tearing up the stairs, Ena's long hair lifting as she went.
The moment Jaspin appeared at the top of the stairs, soldiers began to appear. Lilith and Ena stood either side of him one step behind, as Jaspin cast his magic out, wings splayed and casting great shadows upon the floor and walls around him as light flashed brightly from the spells he cast.
Several of the men fell, Jaspin charged forwards, ripping into the first man he grabbed, and tearing into him with his bare hands. The man's screams only alerted the other soldiers, and more were coming.
'Jaspin!' Lilith cried.
He turned to her, before moving away again, heading towards the nearest exit.
'I am free' he breathed, energy coursing through his body, 'and I shall wreak havoc.'
Ena and Lilith followed in Jaspin's trail of destruction, heading higher, ever higher, towards the first balcony.

But when Jaspin broke through the door, he saw that every rooftop was occupied by a crossbowman.
Jaspin withdrew his wings before they could fire.
By the time the bolts struck him, his wings were gone.
Jaspin moaned in agony, falling on all fours, his body riddled with crossbow bolts.
Behind him Lilith screamed, pushing Ena back behind her. She wanted to go to him, but dared not step out onto the balcony. Her attention drifted to the men outside, they had already reloaded their crossbows, and were aiming at the balcony once again.
And then a voice called out.
'You truly thought you could escape this place?!
Lilith glanced to the figure, seeing Gerald there.
'And I thought I could trust you' Gerald called down to them, addressing Lilith. 'I should have known better.' He paused, regarding them. 'You have the earth maiden with you' he spoke quieter now. 'I see she is awake again.'
As if on command, as Lilith held Ena, she collapsed suddenly, falling in her arms.
'Ena! No.'
'She is not herself anymore' Gerald informed her. 'Not since my man gave her that poison. She will die here. You cannot save her. You will not reach this place, and you will not reach the mountain. Here is where your story ends.'
In the corridor several soldiers charged towards them. One of them grabbed Lilith by the throat, shoving her against the wall and sending a fist to her gut. Lilith doubled over in agony, screaming out as one of them grabbed Ena, lifting her in his arms.
'Don't touch her!'
The man hit her again in the stomach, slamming her head back against the wall.
'You keep silent witch.'
Lilith stared back at the man in fear, eyes wide as he grasped her by the hair.
On the balcony through the door, Jaspin glanced back at them, gritting his teeth in determination. He grasped tightly one of the bolts that stuck from his chest, jerking it out of his flesh.
He rose to his feet again, wobbling on the spot. He turned to face the men in the doorway behind him, standing tall, his wings hidden.

Lilith screamed as the soldier tightened the screw, doubling the pressure on her hand and breaking the bones.
She slumped forwards in her chair when the man stopped, letting go of the device that was fixed to the chair she was tied to, and taking a step back.
'Had enough yet?' the soldier said callously.
'Please' Lilith uttered, her whole body trembling. 'Please stop…'
'We're not done yet' the soldier replied.
Around him there were several other soldiers, lingering at the edges of the room, simply watching.
Lilith gritted her teeth, lifting her head, tears streaked her cheeks.

‘Please just kill me’ she begged, ‘do not toy with me.’
‘You don’t deserve our mercy’ the soldier hissed. ‘You are a monster.’
He stepped towards her again, tightening the screw.
Lilith threw her head back, screaming at the top of her lungs.

‘Do you hear that?’ Gerald said speaking to Jaspin. ‘That’s Lilith. She’s calling out for you.’
Jaspin raised his head, grimacing in pain. They had not taken him away as they had done the others, but dragged him back from the balcony and into the corridor. Here they toyed with him.
‘You will…’ Jaspin rasped, ‘suffer…as you have made me suffer.’
‘Even when you are broken and defeated’ Gerald said to him, ‘you still cast out threats.’
‘I am an angel’ Jaspin breathed, listening to Lilith’s continued screaming. ‘I will never be broken.’
‘I beg to differ’ Gerald mumbled.
He indicated to one of the many guards that surrounded, and the man stepped forwards, punching Jaspin hard in the gut and pushing him back, his heel behind Jaspin’s he knocked him over onto his back.
Jaspin snarled in fury, eyes bloodshot red with pure rage as the soldier grabbed him by the chin, holding hard and lifting the knife up. On either side a soldier moved to stand on Jaspin’s arm, so that he could not move to protect himself. Then, the soldier bearing over him, began to carve deep gashed into his shoulder.
Jaspin moaned, squeezing his eyes tight shut and gritting his teeth. But he did not cry out, he did not scream.
‘I am going to paint the walls with your blood’ Jaspin hissed, eyes wide and crazed as the soldier drew the knife back.
‘Fascinating’ Gerald breathed calmly, moving to stand over him. ‘Such fascinating creatures you are.’
He looked to the soldier.
‘Alright that’s enough. Let’s end it.’
The soldier glanced back at Jaspin beneath him, lifting the knife again.
He ran the sharp edge across the angel’s throat.
The soldiers either side of him released his arms, stepping back. The soldier that had cut him moved away, as Jaspin turned over to his front, crawling on all fours and fighting to bring himself to a stand.
He just about managed it, taking a step towards the door that led onto the balcony, and the open world beyond, the beautiful sky, a vast world above this one.
He tried to reach out for it, all the while blood seeping from the gash in his throat, running down the front of his clothes.
His face contorted with grief as he took another step.
He tried to speak, but the sound came out only as a gurgle.
He stumbled, falling to his knees then all fours.
Jaspin glanced up one last time to the world he could not reach, the beautiful blue sky through the door. He saw this one last time, before his body slumped forward.

The black and white angel was dead.

Gerald frowned down at the body, blood everywhere.
'Finish the others' he ordered.
Downstairs Lilith had fallen silent now, slumped forwards in her chair. The soldiers around them were quiet.
Upstairs, one of the soldiers approached Ena's still figure. She had been returned to the bed, and now lay there, completely unresponsive.
'I'm sorry' the man uttered, drawing his blade which sang as it was pulled from its sheath. 'It has to be this way.'
He stood beside the bed, lifting the blade high, the sharp tip pointed downwards.
He hesitated for a moment, staring into the face of the girl, still so young.
Gritting his teeth, he plunged the sword downwards, impaling the earth maiden right the way through her body, piercing her heart.
Ena let out a scream, waking abruptly.
Her last cry echoed in the heads of every man, within their very minds, inside their skulls.
Gerald clapped his hands over his ears, groaning in agony as the noise pained him.
In Ena's bedroom the man that had killed her was dead, Ena's body transcended into pure glowing light, running like water across the floor, down the stairs and corridors and into every room. All the magic that was contained in her body was now released, now finally free.
It streamed down through the building, growing, every growing in mass, moving through the stone building with the force of a floor.
The light ran through the doors, climbing up the walls and breaking open every window to the outside where it ran into the earth, to the trees to the river, lifting in the very air itself in great green streams, twisting and turning as it headed towards the mountain, towards the volcano.
Everything the light touched suddenly grew bright, the trees grew larger, their foliage thicker and greener, in just a few seconds, flowers sprouted all over the earth in every space, growing tall and many fabulous colours, before quickly wilting and dying, turning black and shrivelling up.

Inside the manor, Gerald stared through the window to the outside world in shock.
'….what is happening?'
He flinched then, seeing the green light that seeped through the corridor, suddenly being absorbed into Jaspin's body.
He blinked.
The angel Jaspin twitched, the blood that surrounded him, had spilled from his neck, suddenly drew back to him, pulled by an unseen force.
The blood withdrew back into his body through the slit in his throat, and Jaspin's eye returned to focus.
He blinked, balling his fists and pushing himself up with great effort.
Gerald took a step back in terror. Jaspin was truly a horrifying sight, still adsorbing the magic around him, still riddled with crossbow bolts, still injured, but now he was strong.
The other soldiers around him all froze in terror, as Gerald had done.

Jaspin tensed his body, forcing himself to straighten, he stood tall, confronting the others around him.
'Now…' he rasped, 'die…'
Blood splattered the walls and floor and ceilings, covering every inch of every surface until nothing but red could be seen. Jaspin was covered in fresh blood, still warm. He wiped it from his eyes, they were glowing pale green now with the magic he had absorbed.
He grimaced, marching down the corridor away from the smell of death.
Everything was liquefied, nothing human could be recognised in the gore. Everything within the human body was all mixed together. Jaspin's footfalls were heavy as he moved away from it all, his boots splashing in the deep puddles of blood and everything else that collected on the floor.
He moved away and through the manor, heading to the place he had heard Lilith's screams, a small room on one of the lower levels. He dealt with the soldier in the room with barely any effort.
Lilith did not flinch as their blood was splashed on her, and Jaspin for a moment feared that she was already dead.
But as he touched her at the neck, he felt a pulse there. It was faint, but she was still alive.
Jaspin unwound the screw that had crushed the bones in her hand, carefully untying her from the chair and lifting her in his arms.
She was unresponsive as he turned and carried her from the room.
'There he is!' called a voice. 'Kill him! Destroy the hybrid!'
A gale erupted around Jaspin as he summoned his wings to him, unfurling from his back, one black, one white. He was a terrifying sight to below, wind whipping violently all around him, his silver hair black back from his face, his eyes glowing a pale green.
He carried Lilith with him as he went, slaughtering everyone in his path with ease.
He reached a balcony, tilting his head back to the sky, feeling the cool wind upon him, the blood that covered his entire body beginning to dry.
'Archers fire!' a soldier called out.
Jaspin curled his wings around his body, using the magic he summoned to form a barrier, protecting himself and Lilith in a small world, just the two of them alone together here.
The arrows all fell from the air before they even drew close. And then the soldiers themselves began to fall, though Jaspin did not touch them.
Blood spilled like rain from the rooftops where they had stood, as Jaspin breathed a heavy sigh.
'Nowhere to go but up…'
He held Lilith tightly to her, stepping off the balcony, he took flight.
They were free.

Chapter Fifty Five
A Dying World

The world began to darken. At first everything had grown brighter, even the sky and the mountains and the buildings. But now, the thick grey clouds formed quickly above them, blotting out the sun so that it appeared only as a hazy in the sky. The world below them turned grey, the grass turning black and dying, the leaves fell from the trees, the bark of the forests turning dark and charred, like they had been ravaged in a fire. And as Lilith opened her eyes, carried by Jaspin who flew ever higher in the sky, she felt something touch her skin. At first she thought it was snow, but as she blinked, her sight focussing, she saw that it was in fact ash.

Lilith tensed her body, pushing away from Jaspin in horror as she saw the blood.

She fell through the air, plummeting down to earth. Blood spurted from the wounds in her back as she tried to summon her wings, opening the wounds again, as fresh as flowers.

Above her, Jaspin folded his wings closer to his body, diving downwards towards her and grabbing her again.

'Lilith its me!' he called over the wind, arms wrapping around her body.

He cast his wings out wide, slowing in the air as they descended, drawing closer to the ground.

Lilith stared up in horror at Jaspin's blood covered face, his pale green glowing eyes.

She collapsed as they touched down to earth. She was bleeding out again, having reopened the wounds in her back after trying to summon her wings, which she had lost.

Jaspin turned her over onto her front, summoning a great fire in his hand, holding her with his other hand, he pressed the fire into Lilith's back, using all of his weight to hold her down as she screamed in agony.

He drew his hand back as Lilith beneath him, slumped, her body limp.

She began to cry.

Jaspin rose to his feet, glancing to the lake beside them.

The depths of the lake was dark, even from where he stood, Jaspin could see this.

He grabbed Lilith by the wrist, ignoring her cries of pain as he dragged her closer to the water.

He paused at the edge, looking into the shadows beneath the surface, before stepping forward, still holding onto Lilith.

The blood from his body washed away, and Jaspin let go of Lilith, reaching into the water and cupping his hands, lifting the water to spill it over his face, washing away his sins, the murder he had committed.

Behind him Lilith stood waist-high in the water, shivering violently and hugging herself.

She watched Jaspin fearfully; unable to move from that spot she stood.

'What happens now?' she uttered. 'What do we do….Ena is gone…?'

'No' Jaspin breathed, placing a hand upon his heart. 'She is not gone; I can still feel her presence…her consciousness……inside of me…'

'She is still alive?' Lilith breathed.

'Of a sorts…'

Jaspin lowered his hand, bowing his head.

'I feel…' he hissed, 'I feel…' he raised his head again, opening his eyes wide, which still glowed pale green. 'I feel her anger inside of me…it….' he tensed then, body beginning to

tremble, ‘it hurts’ he whispered, ‘it hurts inside…its…agonizing….I can…oh gods….’ He hugged himself then. ‘It hurts everywhere…my minds…this terrible pain…’
As Lilith thought back, she would come to realise that this was the last time she ever spoke to the Jaspin she had known. From this moment on, he was different.

Lilith reached out for him, trying to comfort him.
Instead he lashed out at her, suddenly angry and confused.
‘Don’t touch me!’
As he faced her then, Lilith suddenly saw that there were great veins visible just beneath his skin, growing up either side of his throat and to his cheeks, just as Ena had had. He had inherited her sickness, whatever was wrong with her.
His skin was incredibly pale, and he looked bizarre, with the dark veins pulsing painfully beneath his flesh, and his eyes glowing pale green.
Jaspin stumbled forwards, crying out in pain and hugging himself, lashing out again at Lilith who moved as quickly back as she could through the water.
Jaspin stood before her, body hunched over, wings curled around his body, gasping and panting.
He tensed, gritting his teeth as the muscles around his eyes twitched.
‘I beg of you….’ He hissed to Lilith between his teeth. ‘Make it stop…s-stop the pain….’
He wretched then, throwing up into the lake.
Lilith gasped in horror as she saw that he threw up what looked like black sludge, despair descending over her, as she realised, that he was now dying.
Jaspin had the sickness.
‘How…’ Lilith sobbed, staring at him in disbelief, ‘how can this happen?’
Lilith tilted her head back, staring back up at the sky which was thick with dark clouds, blotting out the sun.
It still rained ash which had begun to gather all around them on the ground, on the branches of the trees whose leaves had fallen from them, on the surface of the lake, floating on the top and forming a dark blanket on the waters.
‘This world’ Lilith uttered, ‘…is dying, and we’ve not got long left…’

Lilith hid from Jaspin after that, trying to save herself.
He had lost his mind, and threatened to hurt her, to kill her, and so she ran.
She hid amongst the trees, watching him from a distance as he screamed and howled, calling out her name. But she did not reveal herself.
Only when she saw the approaching army, did she step out from her hiding place.
Jaspin was still calling for her, when the men greeted her, beginning to surround her.
Many of them recognised her.
‘Lilith’ one of them uttered. ‘Is it really you?’
‘I do not recognise you’ Lilith responded, looking down at the man. She looked past the men before her, and saw huddled behind them, protected by the soldiers around, large grounds of women and children, staring back at her in curiosity.
Several of the figures before her, looked towards Jaspin, who had fallen silent, spotting them.

‘Is that Jaspin?’ one of the men asked tentatively.
‘It is’ Lilith lamented. ‘He is not himself, and Ena has been murdered by our enemy.’ She paused then, gazing at Jaspin. ‘He claims her spirit now possesses him’ she informed the others. ‘A piece of her is still alive.’

The soldiers surrounded Jaspin then, keeping him separate from the others as they confronted him. Confused and in pain, he snarled at them, lashing out like a cornered animal.
They tried to heal him as best they could, holding him down, and pulling from him the crossbow bolts that still protruded from his body. As this happened, Jaspin fought with himself, trying to suppress the anger in his mind. He sobbed and cried, as several of the man held him down, tending to wounds, but doing so forcefully, as Jaspin’s eyes glowed with magic, burning him.
Some hours later, Jaspin had calmed.
He lay on his side inside one of the small tents that had been erected by the men that formed the army, Ena’s army, that had travelled this entire way, claiming to be led by a strong force that had led them to this place, to the volcano, where Ena had claimed the story would end.
Lilith visited him afterwards, weaving around the many small tents, heading to the one Jaspin resided in.
She stood at the entrance, watching over him uncertainly, wondering whether or not she should disturb him.
She watched as he lay there, gasping deeply, eyes still glowing brightly.
He glanced at her then, seeing her standing there. He continued to gasp.
‘It hurts…’ he moaned, hand going to cover his eyes, before moving to his head. ‘Agony…’ he shuddered, tears running down his face, ‘…never goes away.’
Lilith watched him sadly, before bowed her head, turning and walking away.
‘What happens now?’ one of the soldiers asked her as she approached.
Lilith gritted her teeth, fighting back her tears.
I cannot cry…I have to be strong.
She spoke clearly, addressing the people before her with her head held high.
‘We travel to the heart of the mountain’ she declared, ‘that…is where everything will be resolved…’
It wasn’t long after that, that the cold began to set in.
Extreme conditions that no one had ever experienced before, the sudden storm that was brought down on them was unnatural and fierce.

Dean carried Ethel in his arms, her body utterly still and limp as he held her close to him.
Dean was alone now, carrying the woman he loved, the woman he thought he would spend the rest of his life with.
It was utterly silent on the bridge, and the ash still gently rained upon them.
He clenched his teeth, swallowing the lump in his throat, as he placed Ethel upon the wall of the bridge.
He looked down upon her face, brushing her hair back tenderly.
Below them, the ground was far beneath them, the drop considerable, the lake was deep.

Dean stared down at Ethel, her face so beautiful, so peaceful, as she lay there upon the wall, flecks of ash beginning to cover her body.
Dean took a deep breath, then another, before pushing Ethel from the wall, watching her plummet down towards the lake and sinking into its dark waters.
Dean watched as the surface of the lake became still again, then he climbed onto the wall, standing tall, before jumping off the edge after her.

Night came, and it was the most dreadful and terrifying experience most had ever been forced to endure.
The world was pitch black, and nothing but darkness could be seen around them.
People within the army began to panic, screaming in terror as strange sounds were heard all around them. Terrible howls and ghostly wails could be heard in the storm, and many people cowered in fear, hugging each other. The soldiers tried to remain strong, calling out to the women and children in an attempt to try to comfort them. But the people were inconsolable, until Jaspin emerged from his tent.
A fabulous bright light began to emanate from his body, lighting up the entire area, as great streams of green light grew outwards from his body.
Everything seemed to fall silent, as Jaspin took a step forwards with his arms held out, and eyes glowing green.
Everyone, the hundreds of people that made up the army, the soldiers, the women and children, all turned to face him, their fear ebbing away.
For a moment the storm seemed to still, giving them some reprieve.
The people nearest him approached as he walked forwards, reaching out to touch his body.
Lilith watched the spectacle from a distance, sitting atop a large rock behind him, out of his line of sight, she watched as Jaspin calmed the people, using the magic within him to do so.
With each footstep, flowers grew at his feet, blooming beautiful colours amongst the ash, before wilting and dying.
And then he raised his head, pointing to the great wall of rock several miles before them, the outside of the volcano, which it was claimed was so large it generated its own weather.
A light grew from his index finger, directed straight for the mountain and crashing into the rock.
With an almighty crash, the rock erupted, sending boulders in all directions. But the mountain was so far away, that it caused no harm to the people around them.
‘A path…’ Jaspin breathed before collapsing, ‘to the heart of the mountain….’
They could not wake him after that as he lay on the ground on his front, instead they took him back to his tent, and lay him down, the mysterious pale green light still emanating from his body, which faded only as the world began to lighten.
‘Daytime…’ one man said as the light from Jaspin’s body faded away, ‘but still dark…’

Later that day, the army began to march, heading towards the mountain.
Jaspin was roused, and he walked with the army after that, surrounded by the soldiers who kept a close watch over him. Lilith was kept away from him, walking some distance away with the women and children.

‘It’s so dark’ one of the women beside her said as they walked. ‘This is horrible….I don’t understand what it happening.’
Lilith turned to face her, hearing the fear in her voice.
‘Its going to be alright’ Liltih comforted her, ‘in the end…’
The timid woman turned to look at her.
‘How could you be so sure?’
Lilith swallowed, facing ahead again.
‘Ena…’ she breathed, ‘she promised everything would be alright in the end.’
‘I was told that she…that she…’
‘Yes’ Lilith smiled sadly. ‘She has since passed.’
‘Is it true’ the woman asked Lilith, ‘that her spirit possesses the black and white angel?’
‘Yes’ Lilith answered quietly, ‘this is true.’
The nameless woman looked away then, and to the world around them.
‘What is happening?’ she whispered. ‘Why is everything dying around us?’
‘Its the sickness’ Lilith told her. ‘Ena has fore told…before she died…that in the end…it would kill us all…’
‘How can we save ourselves?’ the woman asked fearfully.
‘By believing’ Lilith answered simply. ‘Believe in Ena…and her spirit will guide us.’
Lilith stopped walking then, tilting her head back to the dark sky above, seeing the heavy grey clouds overhead blocking the sun, barely visible as a haze through the smoky blanket.
Since the moment that Ena had been murdered, the ash had not stopped falling. Now it was thick on the ground as they walked, almost ankle-deep.
It had not stopped falling, continuing to fall gently like snow throughout the utter darkness of the night, and well into the day.
It never stopped, never showed any signs of stopping.
‘This world will be destroyed’ Lilith spoke absently, almost as if to herself. ‘Everyone who believed in Ena…had faith in her…this entire army and more…’ she paused then. ‘They will be saved, they will live again…in another place…in another time…’
There came a shout then from the front of the mass as they walked, calls of alarm.
As Lilith looked ahead, she saw another army approaching, the army that had belonged to the queen Grace, who had not been seen in days. The army that had opposed them, being guided by Nina and Gerald, dead now, command now taken over by one of the Generals that had served beneath them, it seemed they still sought to put a stop to Ena’s cause, to kill the remaining angels, and stop them reaching the mountain.
‘They still believe we are the cause of the sickness’ Lilith hissed, seeing the mounted soldier at the head of the army that faced them.
He drew his sword, signalling the men behind them to sound the horns, calling them to war.
‘They plan to fight us now’ Lilith gasped in realisation as the force began to approach them.
People began to panic as the women and children were ushered away, and all able bodied men called to arms, ready to fight.
Jaspin collapsed on all fours, being violently sick and throwing up a strange black substance that looked like sludge or oil.
‘Make it stop!’ he groaned in pain clutching at his stomach. ‘Please……!’

The soldier beside him could only stare down helplessly at him as Jaspin lay there on the ground, his wings, one black and one white, draped on the ground, folded either side of him.
'Get him out of here' another man barked, as several moved forwards, grabbing Jaspin around the arms and hauling him away.
'Ready men!' one of the Generals called. 'Reform the line! Sound the charge! ATTAAACK!'
Lilith paused only once to look back as the two armies without fear or hesitation charged towards each other.
Even from where she stood she could hear Jaspin's cries in the distance, travelled by the strong winds around them. She could hear he was in great pain.
She turned and walked away, huddling together with the women and children around her.
They travelled as far away as they could as the two armies fought behind them.
That was when the cold began.
Lilith let out a breath that appeared as a fog before her.
The woman and children had come to rest, and as she sat, Lilith saw again the world around her changing.
Even the rocks and earth beneath the ash was changing, as a strange dark substance infected everything. Even the rocks began to darken in colour and crumble like millions of years had passed in mere minutes, and the people around her began to become ever more afraid as they drew close together for warmth. The children cried, and the women were utterly silent.
And Lilith, as she sat there with eyes out of focus, listened to the sounds around her, of children crying near her, and far away and sounds of men fighting and dying, but nearer than that, Jaspin...
Lilith bowed her head, hugging her knees with eyes full of sorrow.
His sickness was growing ever worse, and as a few of the younger men tended to him, they found that he could not stand, and refused all food and water offered to him.
He had not eaten nor drunk a single thing since he was first captured, what felt like a lifetime ago.
Jaspin… Lilith thought unhappily to herself as she heard his moans of pain, his cries of anger as he lashed out in confusion at those nearest him, *I hope you die soon…just to spare your suffering…you do not deserve this…you are good…*
Lilith buried her face in her arms, holding her knees to her and closing her eyes.
She waited.

The battle raged on, and many people died.
As darkness began to close in around them, the two armies withdrew, unable to see each other and distinguish friend from foe, they retreated.
That night, was the coldest Lilith had ever experienced. She huddled in the icy chill, which despite her best efforts crept into her flesh, ebbing its way into her body, right to the core of her bones.
'This is horrible' a child beside her sobbed as they huddled together, shivering violently. '….I'm so cold…'

The next morning, when the world lightened enough to be able to see, the extent of the battle that had raged the entire day before was revealed.
Lilith approached one of the fallen men, seeing that he was still alive. She knelt beside him, wearing an expression of concern.
'Please…' the man begged of her, '….*save me…*'
'Hurry' a man called out to her as he passed, throwing her a white apron as he went by. 'We have to do everything we can to help these people! Anyone and everyone…we have to save them!'
Lilith hurriedly tied the apron around her waist and around the back of her neck, tying her hair back and out of the way.
Where is Jaspin? She thought briefly to herself as she began to take the man's armour off, seeing his wounds more clearly now. She fetched what water she could find, that carried in great barrels by the convey, and used that to clean the wounds, as all the water in all the lakes and rivers had become infected, turning into filthy black liquid that clung to the skin when touched.
Lilith tried her best to save the man, but like so many around them, he was too far gone, and despite her best efforts, passed away shortly after. Even the seemingly healthy ones began to die, quickly falling and dying without warning.
'It must be the sickness' one of the Generals leading the army said. 'Quick. We have to get to the mountain, leave the dead and dying behind. We have the reach the heart of the volcano. We *have to*!'
'How is the black and white angel?' another man asked the General, and Lilith who was nearby glanced over to them, listening intently.
'He's alive' the General replied, '…for now…'
'For now?' the other man echoed.
'He hasn't eaten nor drunk anything in days…constantly complains of pain…all the time…he is confused…and lashes out at those who try to help him.' The General paused. 'His eyes won't stop glowing, he says he cannot withdraw his wings…I believe…I believe…' the General drew a slow breath. 'I believe he will die today.'
Lilith turned to face the men, feeling hollow in her heart.
She looked away again, walking onwards silently with the others, all the while, the ash continued to fall around them, becoming an ever thicker layer upon the ground, upon the dying earth.
It was getting harder to walk, with each footstep, was a greater effort.

The army walked towards, heading for the great hole in the side of the mountain that Jaspin had created, heading towards its heart, all the while, the people around them began to grow sicker, and many were dying quickly.
They were being left where they were falling.
There was nothing that could be done for them.
It was several hours later, continuing their tedious march towards the mountain, when birds began to fall from the sky. Animals were running out of the woods and burrows around them,

appearing to be in great pain as they panicked, clawing at their own bodies and making the most horrific cries, before collapsing, becoming still and falling utterly silent.
When the marching army came to a small town just before the hole in the side of the mountain, they saw that the very rocks and bricks of the buildings were simply disintegrating right before their eyes. It was utterly deserted, the people had all fled, and the animals that had been left behind, farm animals mainly, were dying.
Lilith glanced towards a horse trapped in a small paddock, dried blood could be seen around its mouth eyes and around its ears, and it was emaciated, missing huge patches of fur is it looked on silently. She looked to the sky again, where the sun still was only just barely visible as a hazy ball, fighting to be seen through the clouds, which were only growing thicker.
They rested here for only a short while, before moving onwards, making their last part of their journey to the heart of the mountain.

Chapter Fifty Six
The Mountain

Inside the heart of the mountain, it was silent. Unlike the rest of the world beyond, there was no wind here, and unlike the world they had seen so far, the land inside the volcano, was different.
The sky above was dark, but on the ground, the trees which grew with no leaves, glowed a brilliant white, their bark shining in the darkness, lighting up the ground at their feet, and the entire area inside the volcano. And the ash, which fell upon the rest of the world, did not fall here.
It was truly a strange place.
The army however, did not have much chance to examine their surroundings, there came a call from the front of the mass, not long after they arrived, alerting the others to the danger.
The people all looked around, towards the other army that was approaching them from the other side, the army they had fought the day before. The men were called to arms.
Lilith huddled at the back with the woman, children, and the others that were already dying from the sickness. She clung back and watched, as the two armies faced off.
But suddenly there came a sound, a signal from a horn, one that was loud and clear, one they had not heard before.
The men on opposing sides glanced around, seeing a third army marching towards them, calling out in alarm. This was the army that belonged to the king of this land, the one that had been fighting with Nina and Grace's army. They had found them at last.
At the back of the army, Jaspin rose from the stretcher that had been used to carry him, reaching his wings up towards the sky. He saw the king of this third army, the king of this kingdom, Cedric was his name.

Even through his one good eye, Jaspin saw him clearly, snarling in furry as he beat his wings, ready to take off.
'You are not worthy as my opponent' Jaspin hissed, before beating his wings, flying over the heads of the army he had travelled with, and straight towards the king that stood before him.
He attacked before anyone else could act, heading straight for the king and summoning to him his magic, feeling stronger now, feeling Ena's magic coursing through his veins. He was able to fight off the arrows sent his way, the arrows that were aimed for his wings. He blew them back, with a strong gust of wind, nothing stopping him, nothing getting in his way as he headed straight for the king of this kingdom.
He cut him, slashing his side deep as he flew past, and spilling his guts onto the earth. The rage and hate instantly emanated from the people the king led as he collapsed, and Jaspin flew away, landing only a short distance from the head of the army, standing now in the centre of the three armies, facing each other.
'And here…' he breathed, his eyes still glowing a pale green, '…is where all this will end…'

Lilith climbed against the slope at the edge of the mountain to see the battle ensue, as below her, the woman and children and the sick, huddled together in the white forest, looking out and hearing the fighting commence.
Lilith watched from a distance, as Jaspin fought alone, cutting down whole waves of people in one sweep.
He fought for a long time, but it was clear even at a distance, that he was beginning to tire.
Lilith watched the bloodshed, watched the black and white angel from a distance, her reaction, completely impassive.

Jaspin fell to a knee as the bolt from a crossbow embedded itself in his side, deep in his flesh.
He moaned in pain, eyes wide as tears ran down from his cheeks, this he could not control.
He collapsed on his other knee as another shaft lodged itself in his shoulder, and another in his ribs.
'I can't go on!' he sobbed, calling out to the sky above, resting back against his heels. 'I can't….'
'Poor Jaspin…'
He heard this voice close by him, and as he raised his head, he saw Ena standing before him, as clear as day. Behind here, were the other angels, Reuben, Aski, and Gael, all smiling down at him, looking healthy and happy.
'You've been through so much' Ena said to him, stepping forwards, her long green hair trailing after her as she reached for him, caressing his cheek. 'But I promise it will all be over soon….hold on….' She breathed, '…just a little longer…'
The illusion was broken then as one of the soldiers stepped forwards, stabbing Jaspin with his sword right the way through his body, moving very close to him to do so.
Jaspin grabbed onto the man, grasping him by the shoulder tightly as he grimaced in the pain and agony, blood between his teeth.
The soldier gripped his sword tightly, jerking it back sharply and moving away.

Jaspin fell on his front, and the other soldiers descended on him, stabbing him over and over again, his blood soaking into the earth beneath him.

Chapter Fifty Seven
The End

Jaspin lay on his front, eyes distant, as his life ebbed away.
There was no one else around him. They had perished, the dead and dying, that was all that was left in this world, and Jaspin was one of the only ones, the last ones.
He saw the world before him, lying utterly still.
A petal , the white petal of a lily, brushed past him then, tickling his cheek.
Jaspin felt it, his eyes widened slowly. He saw a figure approaching him then, kneeling before him, at first he thought it was Ena, which her green skin and pale skin, but then as the figure spoke, it did so with the voice of Lilith.
'……Jaspin…?'
He blinked slowly, trying to clear his sight from the blood.
He glanced very slowly up to Lilith, seeing her kneeling beside him.
She spoke again, and these were her final words.
'Everything dies…'
She reached out to touch him then, resting a hand upon his back, they were alone together her now, in this lonely world, in this strange and isolated place.
The two last remaining angels to exist.
There was a flash then from a distance, and Lilith looked up, raising her head.
She saw the comet falling down to earth, heading in a straight line, hurtling toward them.
Death from above.
Everything was destroyed, as the entire planet, ceased to exist.

Epilogue

The rain in the city fell lightly. A figure stood alone in an alleyway in a quieter part of the streets. The sky above her was bright, the buildings around her tall, and the concrete at her feet wet.

Dark crows perched on the telephone lines overhead, and on the other side of the chain link fence beyond the skate park, traffic was light on the roads as cars drove back and forth slowly.

It was windy in the city now, Lilith stood with her head bowed in the rain-soaked alley, the breeze whipping back her short brown hair. She hugged herself tighter, feeling the leather of her jacket beneath her fingers as her skirt swayed around her waist.

She took a step forwards, walking slowly at first then moving briskly, her footfalls splashing in the puddles at her feet.

She picked up her pace, breaking into a run as she tore forwards, seeking.

She sought to find the other angels again, and the earth maiden, in this new world she had found herself in.

‘It isn’t over’ Lilith gasped. ‘It isn’t over….’